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James Jones

THE WORKS

OF THE LATE

REV. THOMAS SCOTT,

RECTOR OF ASTON SANDFORD, BUCKS:

EDITED

BY JOHN SCOTT, A.M.

VICAR OF NORTH FERRIBY, AND MINISTER OF ST. MARY'S, HULL.

VOL. IV.

CONTAINING

SERMONS ON SELECT SUBJECTS.

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SERMONS

ON

SELECT SUBJECTS.

HE THAT ABIDETH IN ME, AND I IN HIM, THE SAME BRINGETH FORTH MUCH FRUIT: FOR WITHOUT ME YE CAN DO NOTHING.

JOHN xv. 5.

SANCTIFY THEM THROUGH THY TRUTH! THY WORD IS TRUTH.

JOHN xvii. 17.

Of the following Sermons the first twenty, with one more which will be found in its place among the Fast Sermons in another volume, were published, by subscription, in the year 1796. The other four did not appear till 1802, when they had been "lately preached at the Lock Chapel," and were "published by particular request."

The "Preface" relates exclusively to the former series, to the first edition alone of which it was prefixed. The Family Prayers mentioned in it will be found in a subsequent volume.—J. S.

PREFACE.

The sacred scriptures speak of "dead works," and of a "dead faith;" of "a form of godliness," and "a form of knowledge:" and, in whatever way these may be combined together, the whole, as well as each of its constituent parts, must be widely different from "living faith," "the power "of godliness," and a "new creation unto good "works." So that there is often more coincidence, *in this respect*, between men of discordant sentiments upon speculative points, than is generally supposed.

To shew the absolute necessity of evangelical principles in order to holy practice, and their never-failing efficacy in sanctifying the heart, when cordially received; and to exhibit, according to the best of the author's ability, the nature and effects of genuine Christianity, as distinguished from every species of false religion, without going far out of his way to combat any of them; is the special design of this publication. But he has at the same time endeavoured to explain, establish, and enforce his views of the gospel, in that manner which was deemed most likely to inform the mind and affect the heart of the attentive and teachable reader.

The doctrinal part of the apostolical Epistles is always stamped practically; and the holy tendency of every truth is clearly shewn. On the other hand, the practical exhortations are constantly enforced by evangelical motives and encouragements.

This may therefore be considered as a good test of *sterling* divinity; by which it may be known from all that is counterfeit, or greatly debased with alloy.

The texts selected for these sermons are in general very plain and comprehensive; and the evident meaning of them, as they stand in the scriptures, has been carefully investigated and adhered to: so that the reader who hesitates concerning the doctrine, or the conclusion deduced from it, may, by diligently examining the context, perceive how far these are warranted by the authority of the sacred writers.

The author, since he first circulated his proposals, has been determined by the advice, and the reasons, of his friends, to omit the short prayers which he intended to add at the end of each sermon, and only to subjoin some forms for family worship at the conclusion of the work. But he hopes that, as in other respects he has exceeded the proposals, he shall escape censure in this particular; and be credited in saying, that he had no motive in the alteration but to avoid every obstacle to the usefulness of the publication.

To the special blessing and providential disposal of "the only wise God our Saviour" he would commend this feeble endeavour to glorify him, and to promote the cause of the gospel: and, whatever reception it may meet with from the public in general, he will deem himself abundantly recompensed if any persons should, by means of it, be brought to the saving knowledge of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, into whose name all Christians are baptized.

May 12, 1796.

SERMON I.

DEUTERONOMY XXXII. 47.

It is not a vain thing for you, because it is your life.

THE honoured servant of God, whose words are here selected, was favoured with health and the unabated force of all his faculties, at a very advanced time of life: and, so far from claiming a privilege of relaxation from labour, he seems, as death approached, to have redoubled his diligence, in order that the Israelites might have the things which he had taught them in perpetual remembrance. The hoary head is indeed "a crown "of glory," when thus "found in the way of "righteousness:" and "blessed is that servant "whom his Lord when he cometh shall find so "doing."

Among other methods of durably impressing the minds of the people, Moses was directed to compose a prophetic song; as poems are generally learned with greater eagerness, and remembered more easily, than other compositions: and at the close of this sacred song he thus addressed the people, "Set your hearts unto all the words "which I testify among you this day, which ye "shall command your children to observe to do, "even all the words of this law. For it is not a "vain thing for you, because it is your life; and

" through this thing ye shall prolong your days " in the land, whither ye go over Jordan to pos- " sess it." Having given this earnest admonition, he was directed to ascend mount Nebo, that he might die there: a circumstance which could not fail to add peculiar energy to his concluding exhortations.

The nation of Israel had spiritual blessings proposed to them by types and shadows; and Canaan represented the everlasting felicity of heaven, the inheritance of true believers. We live under a different dispensation, and enjoy peculiar advantages. " God, who at sundry times, and in divers " manners, spake in time past unto the fathers by " the prophets, hath in these last days spoken un- " to us by his Son." " Therefore we ought to " give the more earnest heed to the things which " we have heard, lest at any time we should let " them slip: for—how shall we escape, if we ne- " glect so great salvation?"[1] The words of the text are therefore at least as applicable to us, as they were to Israel of old; and we may from them take occasion,

I. To consider the subject which is declared to be no vain thing:

II. To illustrate the import of that declaration:

III. To conclude the whole by a practical improvement.

I. Let us consider the subject which is declared to be no vain thing.

Moses, no doubt, spoke this concerning religion: but numbers would agree to the sentiment

[1] Heb. i. 1—3; ii. 1—3.

as thus stated, who would object to it when more particularly explained. For it is evident that the prophet was not speaking of *natural religion*, or that religion which man in his present condition can discover or attain by the exercise of his natural powers, without any assistance from revelation. Alas! the history of the human race proves, that this is indeed a *vain thing*, and utterly insufficient to direct us into the knowledge of God, or to make us partakers of happiness in his presence and favour. But that religion, which Moses had taught Israel, was given by immediate revelation from God, and was exclusively intended. The same is delivered to us at present, more fully and plainly, in the sacred scriptures; and we may perhaps obtain the clearest conceptions of it, by considering them as a message from God to us; sent by prophets, apostles, and evangelists; or rather by his well-beloved Son. As far therefore as ministers adhere to "the oracles of God," they also deliver the same message; and all who disbelieve or despise them disbelieve and despise him that sent them.

This message from God declares to us his own mysterious nature, by which he is distinguished from all the objects of idolatrous worship; it discovers to us his glorious attributes; his infinite power, knowledge, wisdom, and greatness; his eternal, omnipresent, unchangeable, and incomprehensible majesty; but, above all, his consummate justice, holiness, truth, goodness, and mercy, as harmoniously exercised in his dealings with his rational creatures, and comprising the full perfection of all that is adorable and excellent.

The message teaches us our relations and obligations to this glorious God, as our Creator, from whom we derive our being, and all our capacities; "in whom we live, and move, and are," and "who "giveth us all things richly to enjoy;" and as our Governor and Judge, to whom we are in all respects accountable. It further assures us, that our souls are immortal; that our bodies will rise again from the dead; that "after death is the judg- "ment;" and that a state of eternal retributions will succeed to the present transitory scene. And, after all the conjectures and boasted demonstrations of philosophers, even these fundamental doctrines must rest entirely on the sure testimony of God: for, could it be proved with certainty that the soul is naturally immortal, who could know, whether the Creator might not see good to annihilate it, now it is contaminated with sin? So that, in every sense, "life and immortality are "brought to light by the gospel."

The same message from God makes known to us his holy law, in its extensive, spiritual, and reasonable requirements, and awful sanction; with the rules of his providential government. It instructs us in the malignant nature and fatal consequences of sin; and gives us a general intimation of the manner in which this destructive evil entered into the world: though it it does not satisfy our curiosity by fully explaining that mysterious subject, the difficulties of which are not peculiar to any religious system. But it far more copiously and clearly instructs us in the way, by which we may be saved from sin and misery; which is unspeakably more conducive to our advantage.

The scriptures are indeed more especially a message from God to us concerning the person and salvation of Christ. "This is the record that "God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is "in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life, "and he that hath not the Son of God hath not "life."[1] This is the centre of revelation, in which all the lines meet from every part of its ample circumference. The everlasting mercy of God in purposing the salvation of sinful men; his infinite wisdom, forming the grand design of glorifying his justice and holiness, even in pardoning and blessing those who deserved the most tremendous punishment: his unfathomable love, in giving his only-begotten Son to be the Saviour of the world: the "great mystery of godliness, God manifest in the "flesh," Emmanuel purchasing the church with his own blood; the love of Christ in his obedience unto the death of the cross for us; his glorious resurrection, ascension, and mediatorial exaltation: these constitute the central and most essential part of the message of God to us. "This," says he, by a voice from heaven, "This is my beloved Son, in "whom I am well pleased: hear ye him."

Revelation also announces to us our real situation in this world, as criminals condemned to die: "Dust ye are, and to dust ye shall return." This sentence will certainly and shortly be executed upon every one of us; but we are also liable to a more awful condemnation in another world, from which deliverance may now be obtained. We are therefore respited from day to day: or rather we

[1] 1 John v. 11, 12.

are put to death by a lingering execution; as every pain, disease, or natural decay, is an anticipation of the separating stroke. But we are placed under a dispensation of mercy, and it is the grand concern of our fleeting days to seek the forgiveness of our sins and the salvation of our souls, before the opportunity be for ever gone. The message therefore warns all men to flee from the wrath to come, commands them to repent and believe in Christ, and exhorts them without delay to forsake and break loose from every object, which keeps them from "fleeing for refuge to lay hold on the hope "set before them" in the gospel.

The sacred scriptures give us likewise most important information concerning the Holy Spirit, as the author of divine life, and the giver of wisdom, strength, holiness, and consolation; as engaged to give efficacy to the word of salvation by his regenerating influences; and as promised to all those who pray for the inestimable benefit. "If ye, be-"ing evil, know how to give good gifts unto your "children, how much more shall your heavenly Fa-"ther give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him."[1]

The same divine message prescribes also the means by which we may apply for these blessings, and render our Benefactor the tribute of thankful adoration. It directs us to diligent and persevering investigation of the scriptures; and to continual earnestness in prayer: it reveals to us our God upon a throne of grace, to which we are invited to approach through a merciful and faithful High Priest; suggests pleas to be used in our sup-

[1] Luke xi. 13.

plications; and sets before us "exceeding great and precious promises," to direct our desires and animate our hopes: and it appoints other ordinances, in which we may wait on the Lord, and "renew "our strength," that we may "run with patience "the race set before us." We are also informed in the same manner, that there is an innumerable company of holy angels, who worship before the throne of God, and are nevertheless "all sent forth "to minister unto the heirs of salvation:" and, on the other hand, that there are fallen angels, numerous, powerful, subtle, malicious, and indefatigable, who watch every opportunity of doing us mischief, and especially of deceiving, defiling, and ruining our souls; from whose devices we can have no security but in the protection and guidance of him, who was "manifested to destroy the works of "the devil."

Finally, the message of God shews us the peculiar character, motives, and conflicts of those who are truly religious; and distinguishes them from all other persons: and it gives directions, instructions, examples, cautions, and encouragement, sufficient to render us wise unto salvation, and thoroughly furnished unto every good work. This view of the subject is indeed too compendious to give us an adequate idea of it; but it must suffice for our present purpose. We proceed therefore,

II. To illustrate the import of the declaration, "It is not a vain thing for you, because it is your "life."

"Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy "God *in vain*;" that is, to confirm a false, or doubtful assertion, or in a trifling concern. This

may throw light on the subject before us. The message contained in the scriptures does not relate to things *false* or *doubtful*. There are indeed religious impostors, deluded enthusiasts, and priestly usurpations; but all religion is not enthusiasm or priestcraft. General declamations to this effect only prove that men are *unable* or *unwilling* to distinguish betwixt the genuine and the counterfeit; which evinces, that either their understandings or their hearts are very faulty.—The apostle Peter, just before his martyrdom, endeavouring that the disciples might be able after his decease to have the things he had taught them "always in remembrance," added, "For we have not followed cunningly-devised fables, when we made known to you the power and coming of the Lord Jesus, but were eye witnesses of his majesty: for he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount." But, aware that the belief of this event depended entirely on his testimony, with that of James and John, he subjoined, "We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts."[1]

It may indeed be argued very forcibly, that the *public* miracles, recorded in scripture, could never have obtained credit among contemporaries, had

[1] 2 Peter i. 16—19.

they not been actually performed; and that no future generation of Israelites or Christians could possibly have been persuaded, that their forefathers had always believed them, had the report been afterwards invented and propagated. Would it, for instance, by any method be practicable to bring the inhabitants of this nation to believe, that a hundred years ago the Prince of Orange, at the revolution, marched an army through the German ocean, and that this had always been known and credited?

The argument therefore from miracles openly performed, or publicly attested, before those possessed of power, and engaged by interest, reputation, and inclination to disprove them, is very conclusive: and perhaps no past event was ever so fully authenticated as the resurection of Christ, on which the whole fabric of revelation in some respects depends. Yet *to us* the word of prophecy may be said to be still "more sure:" for a system of predictions of remote events, which no finite mind could possibly foresee, is interwoven with every part of the scriptures, and reaches from the first promise of the seed of the woman to the close of the sacred canon. These have been exactly fulfilling through successive ages, in respect of the Jews and the surrounding nations; the coming of the Messiah, and every circumstance of that grand event; with the subsequent concerns of the church and of the world to this present day. This forms such a demonstration that the Bible is indeed the word of God, that, the more carefully it is examined with a serious and impartial mind, the fuller conviction it must produce. It is indeed a kind of

unobtrusive permanent miracle, which escapes the notice of the careless, but gives entire satisfaction to the diligent inquirer; and to this, all who have doubts on the subject, will "do well to take heed, "as to a light shining in a dark place," till their own experience of the blessed effects produced by the gospel prove an inward witness, the dawn of eternal life in their souls.

We might adduce many other arguments in confirmation of this truth, from the nature and tendency of the sacred oracles; the character of those, in every age, who have most firmly believed them; the efficacy of the pure gospel on the minds and conduct of mankind, in rendering them wise, holy, peaceful, and happy; and the manifold blessed consequences which must follow, if all men did indeed repent of sin, believe in Christ, worship God spiritually, love him supremely, and love one another "with a pure heart fervently." But these few hints are sufficient to shew that our religion is no vain or doubtful matter, but an authenticated revelation from God; and that men oppose it, because it "testifies of them that their works are "evil," and cannot be made consistent with the "lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride "of life."

Neither is it a superfluous or *unnecessary* thing. Whatever plausible and soothing notions students in their retirement may entertain, facts undeniably prove, that reason, untutored by revelation, uniformly leads men into atheism, idolatry, impiety, superstition, or enormous wickedness. Renowned and elegant Greece and Rome sunk as deep into these absurd abominations, as the barbarians whom

they despised. The philosophical Athenians were ignorant worshippers of an "unknown God," amidst their highest improvements; nor have the most celebrated modern unbelievers been preserved from most gross absurdities, or lamentable ignorance. How perplexed and unsatisfactory are their discourses, when they attempt to shew in what way a sinner may be justified before God! Or when they would instruct mankind, in the method of conquering bad habits, resisting strong temptations, overcoming the world, or meeting death with humble, serious, and reflecting composure!

If then unaided reason, in its highest advancement, can give so little satisfactory information on these most important points; what must have been the state of the world at large, if revelation had not been vouchsafed? So far therefore from deeming it unnecessary, we ought to value it unspeakably more than gold and precious stones, and to relish it "as sweeter than honey and the "honey-comb."

The message of God is "no vain thing," because it is exactly adapted to the condition of mankind, and fully adequate to the case of the most enslaved sinner upon earth. If a man's crimes have been ever so numerous, complicated, and atrocious, during the whole course of a long life; if his propensities, habits, and connexions, expose him to the combined force of many formidable temptations; and if his difficulties and distresses be urgent in the extreme; yet, by attending to the word of the gospel in humble faith, he shall surely be guided into the way of peace, find effec-

tual assistance in the path of duty, be extricated from all perplexities, made victorious over all enemies, and finally be brought to the enjoyment of eternal felicity. Indeed, whenever we mistake our duty or our interest, or whenever we are cast down on any account, it may be said to us, "Ye "do err, not knowing the scriptures;" and forget that "thus it is written, and thus it must be." We want no other directions, or encouragements, than such as are contained in the Bible: nothing can be added to this perfect rule of faith and practice. All that we can do in this matter to good purpose, consists in calling the attention of mankind to the scriptures, explaining their contents, and exhorting them to believe and obey the divine message: and, if any one, whether he be a moralist or philosopher, an inventor of superstitions, or a pretender to new revelations, attempt to add to the scriptures, or to amend any thing in them; he may be compared to an optician, who should undertake, by new discoveries, and well-constructed glasses, to improve the light of the sun.

Nor is the message of scripture "a vain thing," or *a matter of small importance:* Moses therefore added, "because it is your life." "Whatsoever "a man hath will he give for his life," is a maxim that is generally found true, though it was once spoken by the father of lies. The merchant throws his rich freight into the sea, when it endangers his life; and the patient rewards the surgeon for performing some torturing operation, when it is necessary to rescue him from death. In ordinary computations life is deemed our highest interest; capital punishment is regarded as the most formi-

dable; and it is an admired, though often a proud and rebellious heroism, when a man prefers death to penury, ignominy, or bondage. Yet our Lord has said, "Fear not them that kill the body, and "after that have no more that they can do; but "fear him, who hath power to destroy both body "and soul in hell:" and, "What is a man profited "if he gain the whole world, and lose his own "soul?" Our temporal life is not principally concerned in the subject before us, but our future and eternal condition. When Christ declares, "These shall go away into everlasting punishment, "but the righteous into life eternal;" the same original word is used in both clauses: and the punishment could not be *eternal*, if the person punished should at length cease to exist. Indeed the strongest expressions of the copious Greek language, that language of speculating philosophers, are used in scripture to denote the eternity of the punishment prepared for the wicked in another world. We are not competent to determine what sin deserves, or how it behoves the Governor of the universe to shew his abhorrence of it. "Shall not the judge of all the earth do "right?" It is our wisdom to submit to his justice and to seek his mercy; and not to waste our lives in vain disputations concerning matters too deep for our investigation.

We must, however, close this part of the subject in a summary manner.—It depends on the reception which we give the message of God, whether we shall for ever enjoy his inestimable favour, or feel the weight of his awful indignation; whether our capacity of reflection, memory, and anticipation

shall be our noblest privilege, or our most aggravated misery; whether we shall bear the holy image of God, or be given up to the unrestrained dominion of every hateful passion; and whether happy angels or apostate spirits shall be our companions, during our eternal existence. In the mean time, this must also determine, whether in the present life we shall possess that "peace of "God which passeth all understanding;" or resemble the tempestuous waters of the ocean, in the dissatisfied and unsettled state of our minds; whether we shall pass through life with comfort and usefulness, and meet death in joyful hope; or spend our days in vanity and vexation, and at length be driven away into darkness and despair.

The scriptures certainly require all, who would "declare the whole counsel of God," to use this decided language: and, whatever plausibility may appear in the reasonings or conjectures of those that become the advocates of the heathen, whom St. Paul declared to be "without excuse;" it is impossible, consistently with scripture, to entertain the least hope concerning persons who reject revelation, and prefer their own self-flattering imaginations to the sure testimony of God. It hath therefore been sufficiently shewn, that the subjects of which we treat, as far as we adhere to scripture, are most certain, necessary, and important; and that, in comparison, all the objects, which ambition, avarice, or sensuality pursue, are frivolous as the toys of children, and transient as a dream when one awaketh.

III. Let us then conclude the subject by a practical improvement.

It can scarcely be expected that they, who avowedly disregard all religion, will trouble themselves to attend to these instructions: otherwise we might very forcibly insist on the folly and madness of their conduct. We would say to such men, Do you act upon principle? or do you not? If you answer in the affirmative, you profess yourselves to be atheists, or at least to hold sentiments which are practically equivalent to atheism. But does any one of those frantic enthusiasts, whom you despise, imagine so wild an absurdity, as they do, who ascribe this fair creation, in which wise contrivance and boundless goodness emulate each other, to blind chance or necessity; or imagine a Creator who totally disregards the work of his own hands? But, were this absurd principle, which contradicts demonstrable truths, as near to certainty as it is possible, what would you gain by it? Should you at last find yourselves mistaken, your loss would be infinite; should you be right in your notion, you have not the smallest advantage: unless you choose to own, that as *you* spend your lives it will be an advantage to die like the brutes, and that the atheism of your understandings springs from the depraved affections of your hearts.

But, if you allow that there is a God, who created and governs the world, on whom all are dependent, and to whom all are accountable, how infatuated must you be, to live as if there were none! never to inquire what your Creator commands or forbids! to be indifferent whether he be pleased or displeased! wantonly to do those things, against which your consciences protest, as con-

trary to the will of God! bestowing no pains to avert his wrath, when you know you have offended him! but wasting your lives in palling sensualities, insipid dissipations, wearisome pursuits, and a constant succession of vain expectations, bitter disappointments, and multiplied crimes, till a hopeless death drops the curtain, and closes the mournful scene!

And are you then entitled, as persons of superior discernment and sagacity, to treat pious Christians with supercilious contempt, as men of weak intellects and disordered minds? when all the instances of credulity and indiscretion, which the whole company of religious people through all generations have exhibited, bear no manner of proportion to the madness and folly of an irreligious life.

Supposing, however, that you do pay some attention to this most important concern, is it not also evident, from the subject we have been considering, that you ought to bestow great pains to discover the true religion, and to discriminate it from all others? Numbers are of opinion, that people should adhere to the religion in which they were educated: but does not this imply that they deem all religion a vain and trifling matter? A nation may retain some inconvenient usages, without much censure: but to support unjust and ruinous laws, because their fathers did so, would imply a most unreasonable and detestable obstinacy. Thus some circumstances in religion may perhaps be retained, because they are deemed venerable for their antiquity; but its grand essentials are "our life," and we are ruined if we

prefer human tradition to divine revelation. Such an opinion vindicates the Jews in rejecting the gospel, and exculpates those who cried out; "Great is Diana of the Ephesians." It espouses the cause of pagans, Mohammedans, and papists; while it condemns prophets, apostles, martyrs, and zealous reformers: and, in short, it considers it as criminal to oppose any established error or imposition. But the monstrous deformity of this tenet must be visible, whenever it is brought forth to the light; and we need only exhort every one to consider the subject with application to himself, and to act accordingly. It will then be deemed most *rational* to examine with diligent and impartial care the evidences of divine revelation; and, if the mind be satisfied in this respect, daily to search the scriptures, with earnest prayer for divine instruction, according to the apostle's exhortation, "If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God, "who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth "not."—But let it be also remembered, that multitudes study religion as a science, and thus adopt a scriptural creed, yea, are useful in propagating the truth, who yet are not themselves truly religious. Nay, many have prophesied and wrought miracles, who have been at the same time "workers "of iniquity." Notions may float in the understanding, when they do not durably affect the heart, or influence the conduct: but unless the truth be an engrafted and sanctifying principle in the soul, it must be "held in unrighteousness;" and such a religion is indeed "a vain thing," though vital Christianity is unspeakably valuable and important.

Our Lord requires his disciples to "seek first "the kingdom of God and his righteousness." We should set out in early youth with this most important business: but, if we have wasted a great part of our lives already, we should immediately attend to it with proportionable earnestness and industry. We should begin every year, month, week, and day, with this "one thing needful;" to which the prime of our affections, and the best of our hours should be dedicated, and all other pursuits, if possible, rendered subservient. "Labour "not" then, my friends, "for the meat that perish-"eth, but for that meat which endureth unto ever-"lasting life, which the Son of man shall give "you." If this be neglected, all is lost, whatever else may seem to succeed: if this be secured, all things will surely turn out to your advantage.

While we therefore call upon you, in the name of Christ, "to strive to enter in at the strait gate;" to deny yourselves and bear your cross for his sake; and to beware that no earthly object rival him in your affections: while we warn you, that it is impossible "to serve God and Mammon," and remind you that the friendship of the world is enmity with God: or while we endeavour to prevail with you, "to count all things but loss, that you may win "Christ, and be found in him:" what do we but inculcate the maxims of heavenly wisdom? Does any prudent man hesitate to renounce an inferior interest, when it comes in competition with a greater, or to neglect some trivial concern, when business of the last importance demands his attention? And who, almost, refuses to part with a right hand, in order to preserve his life? But,

alas! "the children of this world are wiser in their "generation than the children of light."

The worldly man, having selected his object, gives it his most decided preference; he adopts and persists in the most suitable means of success; he exercises self-denial in various ways, devises new expedients, never loses sight of his main point, and endeavours to render every thing, even religion itself, subservient to his grand design. But how different is the conduct of numbers who profess the gospel! How negligent are they of the means of grace! or how soon weary of attending on them! How trivial a matter serves as an excuse for omission, and how unwilling are they to venture or endure any thing in this momentous concern! Men in general are far more punctual to their commercial engagements, or even to their social appointments, than in the ordinances of God: and, did lawyers or physicians study their several subjects no more than nominal Christians do the Bible; or were the courtier as slack in waiting on his prince as they are in coming to the throne of grace; how would men exclaim against their folly and inconsistency! Alas! even the true believer may reflect on the conduct of the prudent tradesman, the valiant soldier, and the candidate for royal or popular favour, till he is covered with shame and confusion.

But let us, my brethren, not yield to this supineness: let us examine the grounds on which we expect eternal life, as a prudent man would look into the title-deeds of a valuable estate. Let us endeavour to convince our children and relatives, by word and deed, that we seek these bless-

ings for them also, as the grand concern: for, alas! even where creeds and catechisms are taught, the conversation of the parlour, and the general system of education, often suggest an opposite conclusion. Let us consider, that we make the best use of our talents, and are the best friends to our country and to mankind, when we most endeavour to promote the interests of true religion. And, should we in this course meet with many discouragements, let us "not be weary in well doing, "for assuredly we shall reap in due season, if we "faint not."

SERMON II.

DEUTERONOMY VI. 6—9.

These words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart; and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children; and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thy house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up: and thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes; and thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates.

The observation is not more common than just, that if religion be any thing it is every thing. If Christianity be true, the consequences of our present conduct are infinitely important: and, while the infidel may be more atrociously criminal and extensively mischievous; the professed believer, who lives like other men, is the most inconsistent character in the world. The language of scripture does not accord to that of modern times: *wicked Christians* and *irreligious believers* are never mentioned in the sacred volume: faith is never supposed separate from a holy life: all worldly men are represented as unbelievers, or as only possessing "a dead faith;" and all believers are spoken of as the servants of God, who live to

his glory, and are distinguished from other men by the whole tenour of their conduct, and not merely by their principles. These things are as observable in the old, as in the new, Testament: for true religion has been *essentially* the same ever since the fall of Adam, though many *circumstantial* alterations have taken place: and indeed the perfections of God, the wants of a sinner, and the nature of holiness and happiness are in themselves immutable.

I shall therefore, without further introduction, proceed to discourse on the words of the text, as applicable to Christians, with an authority proportioned to their peculiar advantages. "These "words which I command thee this day," even the great doctrines and precepts of the Bible, "shall be in thy heart; and thou shalt teach them "diligently unto thy children; and thou shalt talk of "them, when thou sittest in thy house, and when "thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest "down, and when thou risest up: and thou shalt "bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they "shall be as frontlets between thine eyes; and "thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy "house, and on thy gates." It is, alas! too obvious, that professed Christians do not generally observe either the letter or the spirit of this exhortation: nay, that numbers of them would censure or ridicule any of their acquaintance who should practise according to it! Whether this prove that most men are Christians only in name, or whether some more satisfactory account can be given of the undeniable fact, every one must determine for himself.

I shall endeavour from the words of the text,

I. To point out some of the leading principles of our holy religion, which especially demand our unremitted attention:

II. Explain and illustrate the exhortation, and suggest the most effectual methods of reducing it to practice:

III. Shew the reasonableness of such a conduct.

And may the Lord vouchsafe us his special help and blessing, while we meditate on this important subject! For it is astonishing and lamentable to observe how slightly even they who seem to be religious pass over such urgent exhortations. So that, while a vast majority of mankind are altogether asleep in sin, the rest seem not to be half awake to matters of infinite and eternal importance.

I. In pointing out some of the leading principles of our holy religion, which especially demand our most earnest attention, we cannot begin more properly than with *the perfections and authority of God*, and our relations and obligations to him. Though most men allow these truths, yet their conduct in this respect, marks very strongly the distinction between the religious and irreligious part of mankind. Who can imagine, that the gay, the sensual, the covetous, or the ambitious, have a constant and serious recollection of that holy, omnipresent, omniscient, and almighty God, in whom we all profess to believe? May we not rather conclude, that "God is not in all their "thoughts;" at least, that they do not willingly consider his character as described in the sacred scriptures? Do such men habitually recollect the majesty and authority of the Lord, their obligation

or accountableness to the Creator and Judge of the world? Do they act under a constant sense of his all-seeing eye? Do they endeavour to please him in their most secret and common actions, or by their inmost thoughts and motives? Do they seek happiness in his favour, and liberty in his service? Or do they, when conscious of having offended, rely on the mercy of God, and seek an interest in the salvation of his Son, as the grand object of their deliberate choice, and most fervent desires? I apprehend that the most admired and applauded characters, in Christian countries, are as entire strangers to this course of life as the very pagans themselves. But the true believer walks with God; the thoughts of his presence and perfections frequently possess his mind, and habitually influence his conduct; and, in his various occupations and pursuits, he seeks "not to please men, "but God that trieth the hearts."

It is indeed one great end of preaching, to convince men that religion does not consist in coming once or twice a week to public worship, or at stated seasons to the Lord's table: and that these are only appointed means of bringing them habitually to acknowledge God in every part of their conduct; that their actions, conversation, and dispositions, may be influenced by a sense of his presence and authority; that pious meditations, ejaculations, and praises may habitually spring from the temper of their minds, as occasion requires; and that their daily employments, regulated by genuine piety, may be a constant succession of services to their Master who is in heaven.—Who can deny that the law of God requires this at our hands?

that the example of Christ recommends and enforces it? or that the apostle inculcates it, when he says, "Whether ye eat, or whether ye drink, "or whatever ye do, do all to the glory of God?" Perfection indeed cannot here be attained; nor can we say what measure of this habitual recollection is essential to genuine piety: but, if this be the nature of true religion when perfected, it must proportionably be the same in its lowest degrees. If we do not propose to ourselves a high standard, our actual attainments will be very low: and, if the *nature* of our religion differ from all our ideas of the worship and holiness of angels, we shall doubtless be finally excluded from their society, as incapable of their holy felicity.

The eternal world is another subject, which demands our unremitted attention. Death and its important consequences; and the awful realities of that solemn season, when "all that are in the "graves shall hear the voice of the Son of God, "and shall come forth, they that have done good "to the resurrection of life, and they that have "done evil to the resurrection of damnation;" should be familiar to our thoughts, and frequently be made the subject of our conversation. Eternity —the shortness of time—the uncertainty of life—the importance of this fleeting season of preparation for the tribunal of God—the sin, the folly and infatuation, of wasting it in the eager pursuit of perishing things, or in frivolous and pernicious amusements: by frequently recurring to these topics, we should endeavour to excite ourselves, and to "exhort one another daily, while it is called "to-day, lest any of us should be hardened by the

" deceitfulness of sin." A mispent day, or even an idle hour, must on reflection give pain to the man who duly considers the words of Christ, " Watch " and pray always, that ye may be accounted " worthy to escape all those things which are " coming on the earth, and to stand before the " Son of man:" " Let your loins be girded about " and your lamps burning, and ye yourselves like " unto men that wait for their Lord:" " Be ye, " therefore, ready also; for in an hour that ye " think not the Son of man cometh."

Our chief business is not with men: our grand interest is not placed in earthly objects. The Lord himself is " he with whom we have to do;" and, if we are indeed believers, " we look not at " the things which are seen, but at the things " which are not seen; for the things which are " seen are temporal, but the things which are not " seen are eternal." This was the case with all that " cloud of witnesses" who have gone before us. " Enoch walked with God, and was not, for " God took him." Moses preferred " the reproach " of Christ" and the sufferings of God's people, to the riches, honours, and pleasures of Egypt; for he " had respect to the recompense of the re- " ward." The Old Testament saints " all died in " faith, not having received the promises, but " having seen them afar off; and were persuaded " of them, and embraced them, and confessed " that they were strangers and pilgrims upon the " earth." The primitive Christians " suffered joy- " fully the spoiling of their goods, knowing that " they had in heaven a better and a more enduring " substance." They " counted not the sufferings

" of this present time worthy to be compared with " the glory that shall be revealed:" and many of them considered " death as their gain," that " be- " ing absent from the body, they might be present " with the Lord." Yet in these days this kind of life not only appears visionary to profane scoffers and infidels; but many who profess and contend for the peculiar doctrines of the gospel seem not at all aware, that one grand difference between a believer and other men consists in the decided preference which he gives to eternal things, above all the interests and enjoyments of this sublunary world. " To be carnally minded is death, but to " be spiritually minded is life and peace."

The divine law should likewise occupy a large share of our thoughts and conversation. It is spiritual, holy, just, and good, and given to be the rule of our conduct, and the standard of our judgment, and it is " written in the hearts " of all true believers. Thus David exclaims, " Oh, how I " love thy law! it is my meditation all the day:" " I esteem all thy precepts in all things to be " right:" " I love thy commandments above gold, " yea, above much fine gold:" and, " I will walk " at liberty for I seek thy precepts."

Numbers of men, called Christians, prescribe to themselves no other rule than the law of fashion, custom, honour, or trade; that is, the law of their own peculiar circle. Others judge of their conduct by some scanty maxims of morality, or by their own notions of right and wrong: and few, even of those who profess to believe, seem willing to use the commandments of God for these important purposes.—" Thou shalt love the Lord thy

" God with all thy heart, thy mind, thy soul, and " thy strength; and thou shalt love thy neighbour " as thyself." These are the two great commandments, in which the whole law is briefly comprehended. But who can fully explain such extensive precepts, or speak of them in terms of commendation equal to their excellency? There can be no part of our conduct, or desire of our hearts; no thought, word, or action whatever; which does not either agree or disagree with these two grand branches of that " holiness, without which " no man shall see the Lord." With these the believer, as far as he acts in character, compares himself continually; and thus determines, whether he hath acted right or wrong in the various circumstances and relations of life. By this rule he learns to decide in doubtful cases; and he keeps it in constant view, while he considers how he should spend his time, use his substance, or employ his talents; what connexions he should form; whether he should contract or extend his acquaintance; what business or situation he should prefer; or how he should regulate his methods and habits of living. In short, he endeavours to conform himself to the law of God, as the man of fashion or of business does to the rules of the circle with which he is connected.

But, when we have seriously considered the comprehensive, spiritual, and holy requirements of this perfect standard, we shall proportionably be convinced of numberless transgressions, and of immense deficiencies even in our best services: " for by the law is the knowledge of sin." We shall judge very differently of our own characters,

than other men do; or than we ourselves did, before we began to weigh them in this balance of the sanctuary. When each successive hour, and all that passes in our thoughts and conduct, is tried by the law of loving God with all our minds, and our neighbour as ourselves, the boasted goodness of our hearts, the imagined innocency of our lives, the compensating efficacy of our meritorious actions, and the whole fabric of our self-complacency, vanish "as a dream when one awaketh." Then we readily understand that "by the works "of the law no flesh shall be justified in the sight "of God;" and there no longer appears to be any thing absurd, or peculiarly difficult, in this part of the apostolical doctrine. That question becomes important to us, which perhaps we once deemed insignificant or speculative, "How shall man be "just before God?" We inquire with increasing solicitude, "What must we do to be saved?" and we are prepared to welcome information, on the method in which the perfect justice and holiness of God can consist with his abundant mercy, in pardoning and saving transgressors; without excepting eveh those who have committed the most numerous and heinous offences. Thus the peculiar doctrines of the blessed gospel of God our Saviour come regularly under consideration; and open to our view, in their nature, glory, and value, in proportion as we judge ourselves by the holy commandment, and anxiously seek deliverance from the wrath to come.

It is very affecting to the serious mind to reflect on the supercilious disdain, with which men in general treat such inquiries, and those who are

engaged in them. The natural philosopher, with an air of self-importance, considers his experiments on the properties of material substances, as an employment of superior excellency; and, after having spent many months in most exact and minute investigations, he will smile, with mingled pity and contempt, at the folly of his neighbour, who has occupied a few weeks in studying the way of eternal salvation! Metaphysicians frequently deride all those, as discarding the use of their reason, who decide such questions according to the sure testimony of God! Cold formalists obviate all inquiry by saying that 'a good life is every thing in 'religion:' and even men of business and pleasure suspend their eager pursuits to join in ridiculing those humble penitents who seriously attend to this important concern! Yet surely it is most reasonable for a condemned criminal to inquire in the first place, how he may obtain a pardon: and who can doubt, that that person will be most secure from the danger of a fatal mistake, who learns the way of approach and success from the Sovereign himself?

These subjects directly make way for the right understanding of *evangelical truth:* the man, whose views have been described, will perceive that the gospel exactly suits his case, and is worthy of his most cordial reception. He will not object to the truths of Christianity, because mysterious; nor despise them, under pretence of attending exclusively to practice; nor abuse the mercy of God, as an encouragement to sin: he will perceive the connexion and harmony of evangelical doctrines with the whole system of revelation; and will seek

the promised blessings in the appointed way: repentance and works meet for repentance will connect with the life of faith in the Son of God; while his faith will work by love, and love sweetly constrain him to live to the glory of "him, who died "for him, and rose again." These truths will be the nutriment of his faith and hope; he will meditate on them from day to day; thence he will derive all his strength, motives, and encouragement for obedience: nor would his knowledge of the rule of duty suffice even for practical purposes, were he not influenced by the principles of the gospel.

These are some of the most important subjects to which we may suppose that the exhortation of the text calls our peculiar attention. We proceed therefore,

II. To explain and illustrate the exhortation itself, and suggest the most effectual methods of reducing it to practice.

These things must be "in our own hearts," before we can to any good purpose teach them to others, or make them the subject of our frequent conversation. We should therefore apply ourselves, with persevering assiduity, to obtain a comprehensive and familiar acquaintance with the doctrines of revelation, in all respects. Our memories should be stored with the precepts, examples, warnings, and promises of the Bible. "Let the word of Christ "dwell in you richly." This cannot be done, unless we carefully attend to our Lord's exhortation, "Search the scriptures, for in them ye think "ye have eternal life." "The hand of the dili-"gent maketh rich:" and he, whose delight is in "the law of the Lord, and who meditates in his

" law day and night, shall be like a tree planted by " the rivers of waters, that bringeth forth his fruit " in his season; his leaf also shall not wither, and " whatsoever he doeth shall prosper." This man shall be blessed, and shall be a blessing to others.

Labour then, my brethren, to get thoroughly acquainted with the oracles of God: let your judgment be formed according to them: proportion your approbation of characters and actions by this divine standard. In this manner judge of your acquaintance, connexions, and friends; and, above all, judge thus of yourselves. Try by this rule every pursuit, attainment, or distinction among men: let your fears, hopes, desires, joys, and sorrows, be regulated according to it; that all the affections of your souls may be influenced by the pure and animating principles of our holy religion. Thus, when fatigued with business or disgusted with the world, you will have a never-failing source of refreshment, and a most salutary relaxation, to invigorate your weary powers, and recruit your exhausted spirits.

When the word of God is thus treasured up and engrafted in our hearts, we shall be disposed and qualified to teach his truths and precepts to our relations, to speak of them among our friends, and to diffuse the knowledge of them in the circle of our acquaintance. This is strenuously enforced by the exhortation of our text: " Thou shalt teach " them diligently to thy children; and thou shalt " talk of them when thou sittest in thy house, and " when thou walkest by the way, and when thou " liest down, and when thou risest up." In reducing these rules to practice, much depends on

external circumstances. When the Christian possesses wealth or influence, and has extensive connexions, he ought to attempt great things: while a little may be done in a more obscure situation, by edifying discourse, letters, or the distribution of books; provided opportunities be sought after, and diligently improved. We allow, indeed, that conceited disputatious talkers, whose conduct does not consist with their principles, or who grossly violate the proprieties of relative life, are often a disgrace to religion: but, when divine truth occupies the heart, and influences the conduct, a man's ordinary conversation may be rendered very useful, in diffusing religious knowledge, and making others wise unto salvation.

They, however, who are placed at the head of families, should deem themselves peculiarly called upon to teach their children and servants. The examples of scripture are in this respect very encouraging and instructive. The Lord had given promises of special blessings to the posterity of Abraham, and he was made a principal instrument in preparing the way for their accomplishment. "I know him," saith God, "that he will command "his children and his household after him; and "they shall keep the way of the Lord to do judg- "ment and justice, that the Lord may bring upon "Abraham the thing that he hath spoken to him "of."[1] "As for me, and my house," says pious Joshua, "we will serve the Lord." Cornelius the centurion, who "feared God with all his house," and who had pious domestics, and even soldiers,

[1] Gen. xviii. 19.

around him, (though doubtless most of them had been educated pagans,) may be considered as a remarkable instance of the blessing attending this kind of religious instruction: while the awful doom of Eli and his family, may serve as a salutary caution to all who are tempted to indolence or timidity in this important concern.

The ancient method of rendering the truths and precepts of religion familiar to the minds of men, especially of children and servants, is described in the text: "Thou shalt talk of them when thou "sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by "the way, and when thou liest down, and when "thou risest up." And why should the same method be less effectual at present, if it were properly employed? Did we daily instruct our households, by reading and explaining the scriptures to them, along with family-worship; and then frequently converse with seriousness on edifying subjects; did we take occasion from common occurrences, to direct the attention of those around us to the over-ruling providence of God, the fatal effects of sin, the lamentable evidences of human depravity, and the suitableness of the gospel to the state of the world; and did we joyfully embrace every opportunity of inculcating right principles, rectifying mistakes, and making pertinent remarks: young people would be more generally preserved from scepticism, and a considerable barrier would be placed to the incursions of infidelity and impiety. Our Lord himself has taught us this way of improving conversation, in the most simple and easy manner imaginable: he deduced profitable instructions from every occurrence: and grafted the

most important admonitions, even on the insidious questions and impertinent objections of his enemies. We cannot indeed expect to speak with his consummate prudence and irresistible energy: yet we should remember that in this, as in all other things, "he hath left us an example that we "should follow his steps;" and promised to give his disciples "a mouth and wisdom, which all their "enemies shall not be able to resist."

We are also taught in scripture to encourage young persons in asking questions on religious subjects, by giving them plain and satisfactory answers: and some institutions seem to have been chiefly intended to give occasion for such inquiries.[1] "The Lord established a testimony in "Jacob, and appointed a law which he commanded "our fathers; that they should make them known "unto their children; that the generation to come "might know them, even the children that should "be born, who should arise and declare them to "their children, that they might set their hope "in God."[2]

The neglect of this duty is a very dark sign of the present times. Children in general are trained up amidst those very vanities, which they who presented them for baptism solemnly vowed they should renounce! They are early initiated into the corrupt maxims and fashions of this evil world, and brought to join in its frivolous and fascinating pleasures: and, instead of being cautioned against the dangers of conformity to it, are taught to fear

[1] Exod. xii. 36, 37. xiii. 10—14. Josh. iv. 21, 22.

[2] Psal. lxxviii. 3—8.

nothing so much as the least appearance of singularity! Nay, those persons, who profess a serious regard to religion, often act as if they were anxious to give their children a relish for those seducing trifles, from which they themselves appear to be weaned; and were afraid lest they should too early choose the good part that can never be taken from them! It is inexpressible how much these things promote ungodliness, and prevent the permanent success of the gospel. But let us, my brethren, aim "to "bring up our children in the nurture and admo- "nition of the Lord;" hoping and longing that they may be "a chosen generation, a royal priest- "hood, a holy and peculiar people," by whom true religion may be supported after our decease, and transmitted to future ages. In this view we may consider them as real blessings: but in what other light can a pious parent behold his beloved offspring without the most painful reflections?

We ought not, however, to confine our efforts within the limits of our own families, but should endeavour to propagate our religious principles in the world. What reason indeed can we have to be ashamed of them? Or how can we timidly conceal them, without being ashamed of Christ and his words? We live, it is true, among men called Christians: yet it is almost deemed an outrage on good manners, to speak seriously of the doctrine and salvation of our Lord and master! Shall we then hold our peace, and sanction the conduct of a lukewarm or apostate generation by our example? God forbid! We are commanded to bind the great truths and precepts of his word, "as a "sign upon our hands, and as frontlets between

"our eyes; and to write them on the posts of our "houses, and on our gates." This can imply nothing less than an open profession that we are the worshippers of God, and the disciples of Christ; that we believe the scriptures, embrace the gospel, and make the commandments of the Lord the rule of our conduct. These things should be clearly understood by our friends and connexions, that when they enter our houses they may say, 'God is worshipped in this family;' that they may be restrained from evil in our presence by the consideration of our character and profession, and be prepared to hear from us such pious reflections as may occur in the course of conversation.

We shall rejoice at the last day to have our faith and piety made known before the assembled world: what then can induce us to conceal them at present, but fear of ridicule or reproach? We should recollect that an intrepid profession of the truth, without ambiguity or prevarication, is expressly required by the Lord Jesus from all his disciples; that this is one grand means of promoting his cause in the world; that the scorn, to which it may expose us, is a clear demonstration of the great contempt in which the divine Saviour is held, even among his professed disciples; and that this is evidently a cross to be borne for his sake, "who "bare our sins in his own body on the tree." Let us then,

III. Consider the reasonableness of such a conduct.

Should a liberal and honoured benefactor ear-

nestly demand our attention to a message he had sent us; we should doubtless examine it with studious accuracy, and explicitly comply with his desires. Should a friend bequeath us a legacy, we should not be wanting in examining the favourable clause of his testament, and availing ourselves to the utmost of his kind remembrance. But the message of God, in all respects, is far more entitled to our strictest regard. He who made us, and against whom we all have sinned, condescends to teach us how we may escape eternal misery and obtain eternal happiness! Is it not then most reasonable, that we should diligently observe his instructions, and recommend them with our whole influence? The world is against us; the broad road to destruction is thronged; false religion unites with impiety in rendering our situation most perilous; God himself condescends to guide us in the safe and happy path; and shall we reject his counsels? Our own hearts are deceitful; the powers of darkness unwearied in their subtle efforts to delude us: and shall we not use every means of escaping their wiles, and warning others to elude their devices? New forms of delusion start up every day; shall we not then bestow pains to distinguish the truths of revelation from "damnable heresies?" Surely it is most reasonable, both to study the scriptures, and to pray without ceasing for the teaching of the holy Spirit; that we may be "kept from the ways of the destroyer," established in the pure principles of Christianity, preserved from innumerable dangers, find unfailing resources of support and comfort in trying cir-

cumstances, be rendered useful in our respective stations, meet death with joyful hope, and leave the world in full assurance of everlasting felicity.

The knowledge and wisdom, which may be derived from a careful investigation of the scriptures, will be found of the utmost importance, even in conducting our temporal concerns. We shall thus learn the best discretion in estimating characters, and judging of men's pretensions and professions; be directed how to act even in respect of their prejudices and mistakes: and learn to accommodate ourselves to varying circumstances, without countenancing evil by improper compliances, or preventing our own success by violent opposition, where gentleness might have obviated the difficulty.

But the subject is too copious to be fully discussed on this occasion. It must suffice to observe, that the advantages of earnest diligence in the grand concerns of our holy religion far more than counter-balance the self-denial that it requires. For what is it, but bestowing pains to be happy and useful? to live and die in comfort? and to use proper means of rendering our children and relatives happy? that they too may "serve "their generation according to the will of God," leave the world with joyful hope, and meet us in heaven. And are not these objects well deserving of our utmost diligence and unwearied attention?

Let me then conclude with the observation which introduced the subject: 'If religion be any 'thing it is every thing.' It must be our business in this world, if we would enjoy a warranted hope of felicity in the world to come: yea, it must be our element here, in order to a "meetness for the

" inheritance of the saints in light." Every man's own conscience must decide, how far this is his character and experience; and every one must be left to apply the subject to his own case, for conviction, admonition, or encouragement. And may the Lord himself enable us to attend to these things, according to their immense and eternal importance; and teach us so to " number our " days, that we may apply our hearts unto wis- " dom." Amen.

SERMON III.

ISAIAH. VI. 5—8.

Then said I, Wo is me, for I am undone! because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.—Then flew one of the Seraphim unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar; and he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo this hath touched thy lips, and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged. Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I, send me.

When Isaiah had already been employed a considerable time in the prophetical office, he was greatly disconcerted by a remarkable vision, which he records in the chapter before us.—We ought not to imagine that things outwardly exist, as they appeared to the minds of the prophets, when their senses were closed during the visions of the Almighty; but that they were impressed with such representations, as were suited to convey the intended instruction. The scene of the present emblematic discoveries was laid at the temple; every intervening veil was apparently removed; the most holy place was made manifest; and Jehovah was seen in glory above the mercy-seat, as

on " a throne high and lifted up, and his train " (or the skirts of his robes) " filled the temple." This description evidently leads the mind to the idea of one in human form; and St. John instructs us, that the prophet at this time saw " the glory " of Christ and spake of him."[1] For indeed the glory of God is especially made known, not only to the church on earth, but also to the hosts in heaven, by the person and redemption of Emmanuel.[2]

Above the other worshippers, and nearest to the throne, " stood the seraphim," the most exalted of the angelic host, who glow with love and zeal like a flame of fire.[3] These, in other respects appearing in human form, had " each six wings;" with two of which " they covered their faces," in token of the profound reverence with which they contemplated the majesty of the Lord, before whose uncreated glories their derived excellencies were eclipsed, and disappeared: with two of them " they " covered their feet," as conscious that their services, though perfectly undefiled with sin, were not worthy to be noticed by the infinite and eternal God: and with their other two wings " they " did fly;" an emblem of the celerity, alacrity, and delight, with which they execute the mandates of their Creator. At the same time they sang aloud, in responsive strains, " Holy, holy, holy is " the Lord of Hosts, the whole earth is full of his " glory." Entirely filled with admiration of the divine majesty and holiness; they had no leisure

[1] John xii. 41. [2] 2 Cor. iv. 6. Eph. iii. 10. 1 Pet. i. 12.
[3] Psal. civ. 4.

to reflect with complacency on their own endowments, or to panegyrize one another. Such employments they leave to us poor sinful mortals, who, amidst the obscurity of our fallen state, unaccustomed to contemplate any thing more splendid than the accomplishments of our fellow-sinners, are apt to shine in our own eyes, or in those of each other, like glow-worms during the darkness of the night. But these bright seraphs, satisfied with the love of God, desire no other commendation: and are wholly taken up in adoring the glorious holiness of JEHOVAH.

The threefold ascription of holiness to the Lord of hosts, has generally been considered as an intimation of a Trinity of persons in the Godhead, and a reference to the glory of the Father, the Son, and the holy Ghost, displayed in the salvation of sinners.[1] While this song of praise was re-echoed by the seraphim, the pillars shook at every response; and smoke, or darkness, filled the whole temple, as when it was first dedicated by Solomon. The effect which this awful scene had upon the mind of the prophet is described in the words of the text, and the interesting passage may suggest the following subjects for our consideration:

I. The causes of the prophet's distress and alarm:

II. The peculiar nature and tendency of it:

III. The relief and encouragement which he received: and,

IV. The effects produced on his disposition and conduct.

[1] Matt. xxviii. 18—20. Rev. iv. 8.

I. The causes of the prophet's distress and alarm.

It appears, at the first glance, that Isaiah was greatly disconcerted and humbled by the scene which he had been contemplating. Indeed suitable views of the divine majesty and glory always produce proportionable humility; and by this touch-stone spiritual illumination may be distinguished from that "knowledge which puffeth up." When Job, to whose eminent piety the Lord himself had born decided testimony, had been so carried away in the warmth of controversy, as to use irreverent language concerning the dispensations of providence, he was convinced of his presumption, and awed into submission, by discoveries of the divine majesty; and exclaimed, "Behold I am vile, what shall I answer thee? I "will lay my hand upon my mouth. Once have "I spoken, but I will not answer; yea, twice, but "I will proceed no further." And again, "I have "heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now "mine eye seeth thee; wherefore, I abhor myself, "and repent in dust and ashes." He seemed to himself to be of some consequence, while disputing with his friends, and vindicating himself from their unjust charge of hypocrisy: but, when JEHOVAH spake to him from the whirlwind, he shrunk as it were into nothing, and his self-importance was changed into self-abhorrence. In like manner, when Peter saw a little of the Saviour's power and authority, in the draught of fishes which had been brought to his net, he fell down at his feet, and said, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O "Lord."

But, while discoveries of the majesty of God will awe the soul into self-abasement, the knowledge of his moral excellencies is the immediate cause of those humiliating convictions, by which sinners are rendered truly penitent, and induced to welcome the salvation of the gospel. And the prophet seems to have been especially affected by that view of the glory and beauty of JEHOVAH, which was the principal subject of adoring praises to the seraphim before the throne. While men think little of our holy God, mistake his character, or continue in great measure unacquainted with his commandments and judgments; they compare themselves with their associates in disobedience, and estimate their conduct by some defective standard. Thus enveloped in darkness, they judge favourably of themselves, imagine they possess various excellencies, and even pretend to *merit* in the sight of God! Nor is this the case only of the moral and virtuous, for self-love will furnish the most criminal with some palliation of their vices; they will call them by a soft name, imagine others more faulty than themselves, and endeavour to compensate for undeniable and inexcusable transgression, by some pretended good actions or qualities!

But, when the Lord directs the sinner's attention to the scriptures, and makes known to him in some degree his own glorious holiness; deep conviction of sin is the infallible consequence, every plea is silenced, and the trembling criminal is even ready to conclude himself lost beyond hope of recovery.

This fully accounts for that change, which often

takes place, in the opinion that moral and amiable persons entertain of themselves, when they seriously study the holy scriptures. Their decent lives, on which they formerly reflected with abundant self-complacency, are now mentioned in very degrading language; and even their present strict and exemplary conduct is accompanied with very humble confessions of guilt and defilement. This excites the astonishment of those who judge by other rules; and they are apt to suspect, either that such persons have secretly practised very gross enormities, or that they use this language from a mere affectation of humility. But in reality the same characters and actions must appear good or bad, according to the rule or standard with which they are compared: no wonder, therefore, that they who have lately become acquainted with a holy God and his perfect law, and who have learned to judge by another standard, are compelled to bring in a verdict against themselves, though before they "trusted that they were righteous and "despised others." Thus St. Paul "was alive "without the law once; but, when the command-"ment came, sin revived, and he died." He had entertained very favourable thoughts of his own moral and religious character; but, when his understanding was opened to "behold the glory of "God in the face of Jesus Christ," he condemned himself as the chief of sinners: nay, after all his labours and proficiency in Christianity, he was in his own esteem "less than the least of all saints!"

But these things were also illustrated to the prophet by the worship and services, which the seraphim presented before the Lord of hosts. The

ngels " excel in strength," and are glorious
d the conception of mortal men: so that the
eminent saints have been dismayed even at
benign appearance, or tempted to render them
honours. Yet these exalted spirits appeared
on, as engaged in adoration of the great
AH, uniting deep humility with the most
d praises; and manifesting the fullest con-
, that their spotless services were inex-
bly beneath the excellency and greatness of
God whom they worshipped. This view
to have greatly conduced to throw the pro-
mind into that perturbation which he dis-
d on the occasion.

n in general keep each other in countenance,
they rest satisfied with a form of godliness.
go to a place of worship, and to the Lord's
read or repeat a prayer and a thanksgiving;
ease themselves with the idea that they have
heir duty: nay, they have scarcely an idea
nore spiritual worship! But, when their
ion is directed to the devout aspirations of
, Daniel, and other holy men of God; espe-
when they contemplate the adorations of the
nly hosts, as described in the sacred scrip-
; they become sensible, by the comparison,
ney have been heedlessly or presumptuously
ting to the glorious JEHOVAH a formal, de-
and hypocritical service, "drawing near to
with their lips, while their hearts were far
n him." But this very properly leads us,
To consider the peculiar nature and ten-
of that inward perturbation, which caused

this eminent servant of God to exclaim, "Wo is "me, for I am undone!"

Isaiah was called when young to the prophetical office; and we may thence conclude that he had been preserved by divine grace from every evil way, and had dedicated his earliest days to the service of God. He discharged the sacred trust confided to him for about sixty years; yet we do not find, during this long period, that he ever acted inconsistently with his sacred ministry. In his private deportment and public work, he seems to have sustained a most unexceptionable character; nor have we any proofs of his sinfulness but those found in his own confessions. Yet on this occasion, he was so overwhelmed with the sense of his own guilt and pollution, that he was almost ready to lie down in despair! Some indeed render his words, "Wo is me, I am *struck dumb*." 'He was 'struck dumb,' says bishop Lowth, 'because he 'was a man of polluted lips, and dwelt among a 'people of polluted lips; and was unworthy either 'to join the seraphim in singing God's praises, or 'to be the messenger of God to his people.' It is, however, evident that he was so alarmed and humbled, because "his eyes had seen the King, "the Lord of hosts," that "his mouth was stopped, "he became guilty before God," and he feared lest his religious services and prophetical labours should increase his condemnation. Yet this did not arise from the recollection of immoralities or impieties, or from conscious hypocrisy or unfaithfulness in his ministry: but from the conviction of his mind, that his best duties were exceedingly polluted;

whether he considered the holy majesty of the Lord to whom they were presented, or compared them with the exalted worship of the heavenly hosts. He would no doubt reflect, with shame and sorrow, on his want of reverence and humility in his religious performances; on the wandering imaginations which distracted his attention; and on his want of zeal, love, and admiring gratitude, even in his most fervent praises and thanksgivings. He might also, perhaps, be conscious of a corrupt self-complacency and regard to the opinion of men, mingling even with his endeavours to glorify God; and that he had felt but little delight in those employments, which angels deem their highest privilege, and in which they enjoy unalloyed felicity.

As the prophet of the Lord, he had likewise delivered many awful messages to the rebellious Jews: but this vision made him afraid lest he too should fall under condemnation, for executing so important an office from corrupt motives, with a divided heart, and in an improper manner.

He was at the same time convinced, that he "dwelt among a people of polluted lips." The Israelites were distinguished from other nations, as the worshippers of JEHOVAH; and, when the prophet compared himself with them, he supposed that his services were pure and spiritual. But he now perceived that he ought not to be thus satisfied; for, when their religious duties and professions were brought forth to the light, and viewed in connexion with the adoration of the seraphim, it was manifest that God might justly reject them with abhorrence. It was therefore more proper

for him to imitate the leper, who covered his lip and cried, "Unclean! unclean!"

These observations illustrate the apostle's declaration, that "there is no difference, for all have "sinned, and come short of the glory of God." Great diversity is indeed found in the moral conduct of men; and the Judge of the world will proportion the punishment of the wicked to the number and aggravation of their crimes: but in this respect there is no difference, that "all have "sinned." The most virtuous and religious, even they who have served the Lord from their earliest days in genuine piety, must fall down before him in deep humility; and not only confess that they have been guilty of numerous omissions, and deviations from the rule of duty, in thought, word, and deed, but that their very services have often been the fruit of polluted lips. Nor could they ever have been satisfied with them, had they not dwelt among sinners like themselves, and had not their views of that glorious God whom they professed to worship been faint and confused.

Let any man carefully and impartially examine his own devotions, in the closet, in the house of God, or at the Lord's table: let him close every duty, or every sabbath, with endeavours to ascertain the degree of spiritual worship, and of a corrupt mixture, which the all-seeing eye of a holy God must have witnessed in his performances: and I dare confidently foretel that he will ere long cry out with the prophet, "We are all as an un-"clean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as "filthy rags;" or in the language of the *judicious* Hooker, 'The best things that we do have some-

'thing in them to be pardoned: how then can we 'do any thing meritorious or worthy to be re- 'warded? Our continual suit to the Lord is and 'must be, to bear with our infirmities, and pardon 'our offences.' Thus "the scripture concludes "all under sin; that the promise which is by Christ "Jesus might be given to them that believe!"[1] For these are discoveries of sinfulness, from which no man can escape, when he weighs himself in the balance of the sanctuary: so that every one is left to his choice, either to condemn the spirituality of the law and the holiness of the Lawgiver; or "to "submit to the righteousness of God," and to cry for mercy, saying, "Enter not into judgment with "thy servant, for in thy sight shall no man living "be justified."

This humiliation cannot be too deep; we cannot be too sensible of our guilt and pollution, or too entirely delivered from self-confidence. But we may easily be too much *discouraged*, and through despondency neglect the means of grace, and the duties of our station. Many persons having discovered with great alarm their guilt and danger, and being convinced, by painful experience, of their inability to resist temptation or to keep their resolutions, have rushed impetuously into wickedness, impiety or infidelity, to obtain deliverance from the reproaches of their own consciences: and probably but few are duly humbled, without passing through a measure of discouraging terrors. Even the prophet was on this occasion dismayed, as well as laid low in self-abasement: and, if sea-

[1] Gal. iii. 22.

sonable encouragement had not been afforded, the very intention of the vision would have been counteracted, and he unfitted for the arduous services to which he was called.—We consider then,

III. The relief and encouragement which he received.

We are not indeed warranted to expect direct assurances by immediate revelation; yet the emblems of this vision aptly represent the way in which the convinced sinner finds peace and hope, connected with increasing humiliation.—It has been remarked that the scene of this vision was the temple: the altar of burnt-offering was therefore full in view, on which the daily sacrifices and occasional oblations were consuming, by the fire that came down from heaven. The blood of numberless innocent animals slain in sacrifice, and their bodies consumed to ashes, that guilty men might be pardoned and blessed, were constant declarations that sinners deserved death, and the fiery wrath of god in another world; and that deliverance could be obtained only by faith in the promised Redeemer, "the Lamb slain from the foun-" dation of the world," From this altar one of the seraphim took a live coal, and applied it to the prophet's lips, assuring him that his "iniquity was " taken away, and his sin purged."

No endeavours were used to comfort Isaiah by persuading him, that he thought too ill of his own character and services: no intimation was made, that the vision had bewildered his mind, and inspired groundless alarms. On the contrary, the heavenly messenger of peace seemed to allow that "he was a man of polluted lips," and that his pre-

sent judgment of himself was according to truth: but he assured him that his guilt was removed by the atoning sacrifices, and by faith in the typified Redeemer. When Simon the Pharisee disdained the weeping penitent, who washed the Saviour's feet with her tears, our Lord did not vindicate her character or palliate her guilt; but graciously noticing her repentance, faith, and love, he declared, that "her sins though many were forgiven." This is the uniform method of scripture: but numbers endeavour to encourage trembling sinners, by arguing them into a more favourable opinion of themselves, or by pointing out certain good actions or qualities, which may counterbalance their offences. Such are "physicians of no value." They administer fatal opiates to the lethargic, when they have been in a measure awakened: and they prolong the distress of the contrite and poor in spirit. No man is terrified merely by the opinion that his sins are numerous and heinous; but through unbelief, ignorance, or indistinct notions of the divine mercy, and of the blessed gospel of God our Saviour. These are therefore the subjects on which we should principally insist, if we would bring the distressed in conscience to permanent comfort and stable peace. "Faith cometh by hearing:" and, while we point out "the Lamb of God that taketh away "the sin of the world," we do our part to apply "the live coal from the altar" to the trembling sinner's lips. For, when a man is brought to seek encouragement, not from himself or any of his services, but from the infinite mercies of God, through the atoning blood of Christ; and to perceive the Saviour's power and willingness "to save

formed the commands of their Creator. Nay, he made no objections or excuses when he was sent to pronounce the condemnation of the rebellious Jews, and to be an occasion of their judicial blindness, for a warning to all others who "hate the light because their deeds are evil."

These effects of genuine encouragement to the broken in heart were by no means peculiar to the prophet. They will not indeed follow from an *unscriptural* assurance of forgiveness, but they are inseparable from comfort obtained by the exercise of living faith in Christ, under the teaching and influence of the Holy Spirit. The apostle Paul, speaking of his abundant labours and sufferings, says, "Having obtained mercy, we faint not;" and afterwards, "For the love of Christ constraineth "us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all "then were all dead: and that he died for all, that "they which live should not henceforth live unto "themselves, but unto him which died for them "and rose again."[1] It was his earnest expectation "and hope, that Christ should be magnified in his "body, whether by life or death:"[2] other "things "moved him not, neither counted he his life dear "unto himself, so that he might finish his course "with joy, and the ministry which he had received of "the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace "of God."[3] Deep humiliation for sin; firm confidence in the mercy of God; gratitude to the divine Saviour, "who loved him, and gave himself "for him;" zeal for his glory; and compassion for perishing sinners; combined in rendering him

[1] 2 Cor. iv. 1. v. 14, 15. [2] Phil. i. 20, 21. [3] Acts xx. 24.

superior to all other hopes and fears, and prepared him for the most unwearied exertions and patient sufferings, in making full proof of his sacred ministry.

We allow that the subject applies with peculiar propriety to the case of those who are engaged in the same good work: but all Christians "are "bought with a price, that they should glorify God "with their bodies and spirits which are his." They all love the Lord Jesus Christ on the same grounds, though not in equal measure; they partake of "like precious faith" with that of the apostles; and "if any man have not the Spirit of "Christ he is none of his." When therefore the deeply humbled sinner has been delivered from gloomy fears of deserved wrath, and enabled to rejoice in Christ and his pardoning love; he will certainly inquire, "What shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits?" Nor will he, when under the lively impressions of admiring love and gratitude, be disposed to think any sacrifice too costly, any labour too great, or any danger too imminent, to which he may be called, in his attempts to serve and honour his beloved Benefactor. This leads him to consider, in what way he may most effectually recommend the salvation of Christ to his fellow-sinners, or be useful to that "flock which he purchased with his own blood." These reflections will frequently employ his thoughts, whether he be a minister of religion, a magistrate, a steward of the "unrighteous mam-"mon," possessed of influence, or endued with natural and acquired abilities; or whether, on the contrary, he live in a private and obscure station,

a labourer, a servant, in deep poverty, or even in a state of slavery. And whatever be the Christian's outward situation and circumstances, provided he aim to serve the Lord Jesus by a conscientious attention to his peculiar duties, in honesty, quietness, and contentment; he will be enabled to "adorn the doctrine of God his Saviour," and as certainly meet with a gracious acceptance, as if he were sent, like Isaiah and Paul, to carry his message to the church and to the world.

The performance of relative duties, even when the most unkind returns are experienced; strict integrity under heavy losses and in trying circumstances; patience and meekness amidst sufferings and injuries: are in some respects equivalent to the prophet's alacrity in undertaking the painful service allotted him. And, in proportion as the believer can unite deep humility with assured hope and fervent zeal, he will act with decision according to the commands of his Lord, and the opportunities or advantages afforded him. But, if pride warp his steady aim and mar his simplicity, or negligence make way for guilt and alarm; he will find himself in all respects indisposed for difficult, perilous, or self-denying services. When discouragement prevails, "the hands hang down and "the knees wax feeble:" a man in this case scarcely finds himself at liberty to speak a word on religious subjects, for the instruction even of his own family; and still less to attempt any thing of a more arduous nature, for the glory of God and the benefit of his church. When David had been grievously overcome by temptation, he found that conscious guilt rendered him incapable of renew-

ing his bold and zealous endeavours in the service of God. He therefore prayed, "Open my lips, O "Lord, that my mouth may shew forth thy praise." But, when "the joy of God's salvation" is restored, the lively exercise of every holy affection renders a man ready to say, "Here am I, send me:" If so poor a worm as I am may glorify thy name, O Lord, I would thankfully yield myself to thy disposal, that I may be employed in any way which may seem good in thy sight.

If then these be indeed the effects of such humbling and encouraging views of the Lord and of heavenly things, as have been described; we ought certainly to inquire with great seriousness, whether we have learned or experienced any thing of the same nature?—And this may introduce an address to different descriptions of persons.

There are numbers, who do not wish to be thought infidels or irreligious; but call themselves believers, render some worship to God, and respect the name of Christ and the leading truths of Christianity: yet they by no means think that they are altogether sinful, and exposed to just condemnation even for the defilements of their religious duties. They adopt various methods of eluding the inferences we draw from the general declarations of scripture, concerning the deceitfulness and desperate wickedness of the human heart; and object to every attempt made to convince them, that they themselves, as well as gentiles and wicked Jews, are included in these unrestricted charges. These appear to them hard "sayings;" because they deprive them of every

plea, undermine the foundation of their hope, and exclude all boasting and self-preference. But, if you have been used to reason and object in this manner, let me earnestly intreat and conjure you, seriously to answer the following questions: Do you really think your own hearts, characters, and services to be more holy and excellent, than those of Job, Isaiah, Daniel, or Paul? Or do you suppose that your superior sanctity is proportioned to the difference of the language you use in speaking of your virtues and duties? If you cannot without affectation adopt their humiliating expressions, it must arise from one of these causes: either your conduct and character are far more holy than their's were; or they knew far more of God and of themselves, than you do. You are either much better men; or you are much less acquainted with those things which are essential to a right judgment of characters and actions.

When the apostle said, "God, who commanded "the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined "in our hearts, to give us the light of the know-"ledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus "Christ;" he assigned the real cause of the lowly opinion which eminent saints have ever entertained of themselves: and a want of this divine illumination gives occasion for that favourable estimate which numbers form of their virtues and characters. If then this be the case, or if there be the least probability that it is so; would it not be wise in you, my friends, to intreat the Lord, that he would "open your understandings to understand "the scriptures?" and would it be improper for you, frequently to meditate with fixed attention on

the glorious perfections and holy commandments of God? Let me affectionately beseech you to compare your duties with the standard of holy writ; to watch your own hearts, while engaged in them; and to examine impartially your motives in those services, to which you annex some confused idea of merit, and which you hope will make amends, in part at least, for the undeniable defects of your character. A day approacheth, in which every eye shall behold a far more glorious scene than that which overwhelmed the mind of the prophet Isaiah. The divine Saviour will appear "in his "own glory, and in the glory of the Father, with "all his holy angels." Then every action will be weighed in an impartial balance; every character will be fully made known; and every unpardoned transgressor will be struck dumb in the presence of his Judge, or will be only able to say, 'Wo is 'me, I am undone!' while the awful words, "Depart ye cursed into everlasting fire, prepared "for the devil and his angels," shall fill him with terror and sink him into despair. But at present there is hope: and those discoveries of guilt which tend to humble us, and prepare us for welcoming the salvation of God, should be considered as inestimable mercies, the forerunners of "joy un-"speakable and full of glory."

But perhaps these subjects have rendered you uneasy and dejected; and you have on that account deemed it best to divert your attention from them, and at any rate to keep on good terms with your own consciences. You therefore neglect the scriptures, and such books, company, or preaching, as formerly disquieted you; and, hearkening

to worldly counsellors, seek relief from diversions, indulgences, or a hurry of business; or perhaps try to dispel melancholy by 'a cheerful glass.' Thus numbers close their eyes against the light, because they hate it, till the Lord gives them up to judicial blindness!

My beloved fellow sinners, as you value your immortal souls, do not yield to such temptations. Do not shrink from the discovery of your real character and condition, while hope remains. The knowledge of the disease is the first step towards recovery: but a groundless imagination that there is no danger is the common prelude to an incurable prevalence of the malady. As reasonable agents, examine this matter with an accuracy and impartiality proportioned to its importance: that, in case your confidence of safety should be found a mere presumption, you may now seek and obtain that inward satisfaction which the prophet felt, when assured that "his iniquity was taken away, "and his sin purged." Can you doubt, whether it be better to discover your danger now, or to remain strangers to it, till God shall call you to receive your eternal retribution?

But are any of you so deeply convinced of sin as to be ready to say, 'Wo is me, I am undone!' Let me caution you, my brethren, against despondency. The wreck and ruin of self-confidence makes way for evangelical hope. The Son of God "came into the world to save sinners;" "to seek "that which was lost;" "not to call the righteous, "but sinners to repentance;" "to reconcile ene-"mies by the blood of his cross;" "to receive "gifts for the rebellious;" "to justify the un-

"godly;" to sanctify the unholy; to give life to the dead, strength to the helpless, liberty to the captive, and felicity to the wretched. He invites all who are athirst, yea, all that are willing, to come and buy of him the blessings of salvation, "without money and without price." "Him that "cometh unto me," saith the Saviour, "I will in "no wise cast out."—"Behold then the Lamb of "God, that taketh away the sin of the world!" He is "the author and finisher of faith;" and he hath pointed out to you the proper way of seeking peace and salvation, in these most instructive and encouraging words: "Ask and it shall be given "you; seek and ye shall find; knock and it shall "be opened unto you: "for every one that asketh "receiveth, and he that seeketh findeth, and to "him that knocketh it shall be opened."[1]

But some hearers of the gospel are sufficiently confident that their sins are forgiven, and that they have experienced that change which is described in the scripture: yet they are not disposed to say, "Here I am, Lord, send me." They shew no zeal for the honour of God; no readiness for self-denying services; no tokens of being constrained by the love of Christ to live as his devoted servants. It does not appear that their terrors were accompanied by humiliation and hatred of sin, or their comforts by "the sanctification of the "Spirit unto obedience." But let us all beware of this delusion; "for every tree that bringeth "not forth good fruit, is hewn down and cast into "the fire."

[1] Matt. vii. 7, 8.

Finally, my Christian brethren, I beseech you "by the mercies of God," to desire an increase of that spiritual knowledge which produces humility; but at the same time to watch against discouraging fears, while conscious of integrity in your professed faith and love, and in your desire to honour the Lord by thankful obedience. For these indulged and needless apprehensions render the mind too feeble for active service or patient suffering; and they give religion a forbidding and unamiable aspect. Let us therefore unite all our contemplations on other subjects with frequent meditations on the mercy and grace of God our Saviour; be very careful not to grieve the Holy Spirit by evil tempers or a selfish behaviour; and be diligent in every means of grace. Above all, let us pray without ceasing for such a sweet sense of the Lord's pardoning mercy and abundant grace, as may animate all our endeavours to shew the holy tendency of our principles, and to make those "ashamed who would falsely accuse our good "conversation in Christ."

SERMON IV.

1 JOHN IV. 8.

God is love.

THE sacred writers do not enforce practical religion by such inducements as are commonly suggested by moralists and philosophers. The beauty of virtue, its utility to mankind, and its benign effects on the health, peace, interest, and reputation of the possessor, may be mentioned with propriety as subordinate recommendations; but the authority, command, example, and glory of God, constitute the primary motives and ultimate object of genuine holiness; and every duty is inculcated in the New Testament by the encouragements and obligations of the gospel. "Beloved," says the aged apostle, "let us love one "another, for love is of God, and every one that "loveth is born of God, and knoweth God: he "that loveth not knoweth not God; for GOD IS "LOVE.—In this was manifested the love of God "towards us, because that God sent his only be-"gotten Son into the world, that we might live "through him."

Let us then,

I. Inquire how such compendious propositions as this in the text should be understood:

II. Illustrate the truth and importance of it from

the dealings of God with his creatures, especially with mankind:

III. Point out certain perverse inferences which are frequently deduced from it:

IV. And lastly, make some practical use of the subject.

I. In what manner ought we to understand such compendious propositions as this in the text?

There is a peculiar curse, as it were, connected with indolence and levity in the grand concerns of religion. If a man will trifle in matters of the last importance, and if, instead of carefully examining the meaning of an expression, as it stands in the context and forms a part of a consistent revelation, he only attend to the mere sound of the words, allowing his prejudices and passions to interpret them; he will surely be taken in a snare, and perhaps left "to wrest the scriptures to his "own destruction." The diligent and faithful servant will not only consider a few words of the commands or directions of his master; but he will observe the whole of them, weigh their import, and endeavour fully to understand them. This is the proper use of reason in respect of divine revelation. We are neither authorized nor qualified to sit in judgment on the testimony of God, to reject any part of it as useless or injurious, to propose alterations, or to make additions. All such attempts are both absurd and presumptuous in the extreme. But our rational powers are the gift of God, to whom we are accountable for our use of them: and, as we should soberly examine what ground we have to believe the scriptures to be a divine

revelation, so we ought to study them with diligence and teachableness; and, depending on the promised assistance of the Holy Spirit, endeavour to find out the real meaning of every proposition contained in them.

We meet with several comprehensive declarations in the sacred oracles; which must always be explained by comparing them with such passages as more fully state and unfold the doctrines of Christianity. The apostle John in another place, says, that "God is Light:" James affirms that "He is "the Father of lights, with whom is no variable-"ness or shadow of turning:" and Paul declares, that "our God is a consuming fire." Now a man would not think of inferring from this last expression, that the Lord cannot exercise mercy, but must punish and destroy all sinners without exception: and this apparent limitation is also implied when it is said that GOD IS LOVE.

"Thus saith the high and lofty One, that inha-"biteth eternity, whose name is Holy:" if then the Lord's name be *Holy*, he is *holiness*, as certainly as he is *love*. The same might be shewn in respect of all his perfections; except that love takes the lead, as it were, in the display which he makes of his glorious character.

We discourse indeed on such subjects like children: we are wholly incapable of conceiving aright of the divine nature: the attributes of the Deity doubtless exist and operate with a simplicity that we cannot explain, and probably there is not that entire distinction between the effects of mercy, justice, truth, and holiness, in the divine nature

and conduct, which appears to our contracted minds. Yet it may encourage us, under this our conscious incapacity, to reflect that the Lord himself speaks to us in our own language; as more conducive to our benefit, though less flattering to our pride. Philosophers, it is true, frequently reject the style of scripture, and attempt to prove that there is nothing in the divine nature which can properly be called wrath, indignation, or avenging justice. But, whatever use may be made of these speculations, in teaching us to exclude from our thoughts concerning the infinite God every idea which originates from the corrupt passions of our fallen nature; it is evident that this is not the best method of addressing mankind: neither the most intelligible, most impressive, or most useful: for it is not the style of the only wise God himself. In speaking to us, he has seen good to adopt that kind of language which is commonly used by the unlearned, that is, by an immense majority of the human species.

We must therefore continue to discourse of the divine attributes, as distinct though harmonious: and when we read that "God is love," we must suppose that a different instruction is intended than when we are told, that "our God is a con-"suming fire." The declaration, that the Lord is "a holy and just God," has a different meaning from the encouraging assurance, that "He is "merciful and gracious, forgiving iniquity, trans-"gression, and sin." Yet these distinct attributes perfectly harmonize in the divine character, and only *seem* to limit each other: for the Lord is in-

finite in wisdom, justice, holiness, goodness, mercy, and truth; exactly as if each attribute subsisted alone in his incomprehensible nature.

We must not, however, imagine, when it is said that God is love, or truth, or vengeance, that these properties are so essential to him, that they cannot but act to the utmost in all possible cases; as fire cannot but burn, whether the effects be useful or destructive; or as water must rush downward, when obstructions are removed, whether it fertilize or deluge the country. We should remember that he acts with most perfect freedom, and unerring wisdom, "according to the counsel of "his own will." It is therefore impossible that any divine attribute could have been exercised in a greater degree, or in a different manner, than it has been: because the works of the Lord's power, and the effects of his justice and love, have been exactly as many and as great, as infinite wisdom determined they should be.

We may perhaps discover a faint illustration of the subject in the conduct of two affluent persons, both apparently very liberal. The one, not duly estimating the real value of riches, or the true ends of generosity, scatters abroad with a lavish hand, till he exhausts the very resources of his bounty; while his indiscriminate liberality often encourages vice, and does more harm than good to society. The other considers his wealth as an improvable talent: he gives and spends only when he judges that it will answer some good purpose; he frequently rejects importunate applications, but on other occasions he is bountiful without waiting to be solicited. He studies to exercise beneficence

in consistency with justice, and to retain the ability of permanent usefulness: he aims to render his liberality subservient to the best interests of mankind, and uniformly to discountenance sloth, profligacy, and ungodliness. And thus, while he seems to limit his bounty, he renders it more abundantly and durably useful, by regulating it with prudence and discretion.—In like manner the wisdom and justice of God may appear to restrain the exercise of his love; but they only direct it in that manner, which is most worthy and honourable to his name, and which best promotes the interest of his universal and everlasting kingdom.

It may therefore suffice in general to observe, that the Lord acts freely and according to his own perfections, and not by constraint or reluctantly; that loving kindness is his peculiar honour, which adds lustre to all his other attributes; that he delights in goodness and mercy, and rejoices in his boundless power of communicating felicity; that he is not in any respect less holy, just, and true, than if he had shewn no mercy; and that it is impossible he should communicate more happiness, upon any other plan, than he actually will communicate in that way which his infinite wisdom has devised, whatever ignorance or presumption may imagine or assert.

II. We proceed then to illustrate the truth and importance of the doctrine contained in the text, from the dealings of God with his creatures, especially with the human race.

This will be rendered very evident by considering a gradation of events, in which the Lord has

exercised love and mercy, far beyond all that ever could have entered into the heart of man to conceive, had it not been revealed.

Let us then endeavour to realize, as far as such poor worms are able, the infinite and self-existent God, from all eternity possessed of essential glory and felicity, incapable of increase or diminution.

Thus circumstanced, he could have no other possible inducement but love, or a disposition to delight in communicating happiness, in creating the universe, and producing a vast variety of beings, capable of life and enjoyment. The inanimate creation was formed perfectly good, and exactly suited to the use and benefit of living creatures. The numerous orders of these, from the invisible animated atom to the bright seraph before the throne, were all made complete in their kind, adapted to the place and design of their existence, and capable of a measure of enjoyment: and, except as sin has deranged the original constitution of infinite love, no creature is left destitute of a degree of happiness equal to its capacity. In meditating, however, on this subject, we must recollect, that "the creation groaneth and travail-"eth in pain," through the sins of man: his cruelty and tyranny add immensely to the sufferings of innocent animals, and he is punished in them, as his property and the subjects of his original dominion.

It is also worthy of observation, that no rational creature has ever been deprived of an adequate felicity, except in the case of transgression; at least we have no intimation of such a fact, either in the works or in the word of God. None has

been degraded to an inferior situation, rendered uncertain in respect of the future, or distressed by terror, bitterness, or vanity. On the contrary, we have every reason to conclude that the capacities of all obedient creatures continually expand; that their enjoyment proportionably increases; and that they all will become more and more blessed to all eternity. In these things surely GOD IS LOVE!

If the case of infants should be thought an exception, seeing they suffer and die without personal criminality; we may observe, without entering on an intricate controversy, that all who believe the Bible must allow the human race to have become sinful and mortal by the fall of Adam; and they who reject revelation will not find less difficulty than others, in accounting for the present condition of mankind. If then every branch fell when the root was overthrown; if we are 'born in sin and the children of wrath;' it behoves us to be silent on this subject, and to wait for the clearer light of the great decisive day. For indeed it is highly probable, that the case of infants will then appear not only consistent with the divine justice, in respect of their present sufferings, but one grand display of the divine mercy and goodness, in the felicity by which those sufferings were succeeded.

The Lord, having, then created various orders of rational creatures, has further manifested his "love," by condescending to become their moral Governor. Infinite wisdom, justice, goodness, and truth, are indispensably requisite in the Sovereign of the universe. His government must

be infinitely perfect, and of the highest possible advantage to all creatures. "The Lord reigneth, "let the earth rejoice: for nothing, but enmity, and rebellion, can be dissatisfied. The law also, being holy, just, and good, was dictated by perfect love. Like a wise and kind father, the Lord requires us "to love him with all our hearts," and, "to love others as ourselves:" every other requirement may be readily resolved into these two great commandments; and, if they were universally obeyed, universal harmony and felicity would be the consequence. Yet this is the law, against which the corrupt passions of man's heart rise in desperate enmity!—Who then can deny that GOD IS LOVE?

But the law is enforced by an awful sanction, and it denounces an awful curse against every transgressor: what then shall we say to this? It would not perhaps be difficult to prove, that the punishments, threatened in the law and inflicted by the justice of God, result from love directed by infinite wisdom: not love of the individuals whose final condemnation is determined, but enlarged benevolence to universal being through eternal ages. This, however, would carry us too far from our subject: it must therefore suffice to observe, that in the government of accountable creatures, who act voluntarily, and are influenced by motives, the denunciation of punishment must form a part of the system: and, if this punishment be only inflicted on the disobedient, and do not exceed the heinousness of their crimes; while it tends to retain multitudes in obedience, and preserve the universe from the effects of general re-

bellion; it must prove a public benefit, and consist with wise and holy love. That must be the most beneficent plan, which secures the greatest, most extensive, and most permanent advantages to the most excellent part of moral agents: and the philosophical notion, that the felicity even of sinful creatures is the ultimate end proposed to himself by the Governor of the world, is not more repugnant to scripture, than to the common sense and opinion of mankind in similar cases. A wise ruler of a nation, in proportion as he loved his people, would be careful, by good laws impartially executed, to restrain the ill-disposed from injuring their fellow subjects, and disturbing the peace of the community: and, if this made it necessary to punish with death some individuals, these would be considered as suffering for the public good; and, provided they deserved their doom, it would not be deemed an impeachment of his paternal love to his people. On the contrary, the prince, who under the plea of clemency should neglect to punish evil doers, and to protect his peaceable subjects, might indeed be the favourite of the fraudulent and rapacious, but his conduct would be reprobated by all honest men.

But, as we are not capable of fully comprehending the plan of the divine government, let us turn our thoughts to another view of the subject.—The Lord hath shewn that he is love, in his dealings with sinful men, by his patience and providential bounty. Could we possibly witness all the crimes of every description, with all their aggravations, which are perpetrated in London, or any other large city, during a single day; could we see the

malignity of every sin, and conceive of them all as committed against *us*, by persons on whom we had conferred the greatest favours; and did we possess the unrestrained power of executing vengeance; I am persuaded that our patience would be wearied out before evening. But the Lord at once sees all the sins committed in the whole world, together with the desperate wickedness of the human heart; he abhors, with unalterable and infinite hatred, every kind and degree of unholiness; he is able at any moment to punish sinners with irresistible vengeance; he could sustain no loss, if he destroyed all the workers of iniquity; and he might do it consistently with most perfect justice. Yet he bears with the rebellions of mankind from age to age; he endures the provocations of guilty lands, during the course of revolving centuries, while their presumptuous ingratitude continually increases; he prolongs the lives of individuals to fifty, sixty, seventy, or eighty years, while they defy his justice, ridicule his works and word, or persecute to death his inoffensive worshippers! This is a very affecting illustration of the subject, and a convincing proof that GOD IS LOVE. "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not "consumed:" and, besides the value of a reprieve to a condemned criminal, several of us are under unspeakable obligations to the long-suffering of our God; as he spared us during many years, when we lived in unrepented sin, that he might at length make us partakers of his great salvation.

But, as if exemption from deserved misery were a small matter, the Lord confers on sinful men an exuberance of temporal comforts and benefits.

From year to year he fills the earth with his riches: summer and winter, seed-time and harvest, do not fail: things most necessary to the life of man are most plentifully bestowed; but the revolving seasons bring us a constant succession of valuable productions, to regale us with an agreeable variety of indulgence: and, though we too commonly abuse this bounty to the dishonour of the Giver, every sense is liberally gratified with its proper object. The Lord holdeth our souls in life: his arm protects us, and his providence watches over us; while perhaps we proudly refuse to supplicate his favour, or ungratefully neglect to acknowledge his mercy. He defends us from sickness, or heals our infirmities: he corrects with gentleness, and seems in haste to relieve our distresses: he sometimes shews us the danger, that our deliverance may be the more affecting; but more frequently he spares us the alarm, though he knows this will render us less attentive to his kindness. In these, and various similar instances, "the Lord is loving "unto every man:" "He maketh his sun to rise "on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain "on the just and on the unjust." "Oh that men "would therefore praise the Lord for his good-"ness, and for his wonderful works to the children "of men!"

These are, however, subordinate proofs that GOD IS LOVE; and the apostle did not so much as stop to notice them, but with a beautiful abruptness hastened to select the grand illustration and demonstration of his doctrine: "In this "was manifested the love of God towards us, be-"cause that God sent his only-begotten son into

"the world, that we might live through him. "Herein was love, not that we loved God, but that "he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propi- "tiation for our sins." The Lord's purpose of pardoning sinners, and advancing them to a higher degree of glory and felicity than that from which they had fallen, is not considered as the grand proof that God is love; though the knowledge of him and of ourselves will convince us, that it is too vast for our capacities, and exceeds all computation: but *the means* of our recovery and reconciliation are represented as exhibiting a still more astonishing illustration of the subject. Could the blessings designed us have been honourably conferred by an act of sovereignty, without the intervention of a Mediator and an atoning sacrifice, as a prince pardons and then prefers a man who has been guilty of treason; the obligation would have been immense. But it appears that this was impossible, because the Lord "cannot deny himself," or act inconsistently with his own perfections. When, therefore, the honour of his law and justice seemed to place an insurmountable barrier to the exercise of pardoning mercy; when he could have glorified himself in the destruction of our rebellious race, and in creating worlds replenished with nobler inhabitants; that he should form and accomplish the plan of saving us by the incarnation and sufferings of his only-begotten Son was most stupendous mercy! that he should do this unsolicited by sinners; yea, while they continued to harden their hearts in daring rebellion against him! that he should both purpose the design of "reconciling "the world to himself" by the interposition of a

surety; and, when the whole creation could not supply any being, whose dignity, love, and power, were adequate to the arduous and gracious undertaking, that he should so love the world, as to give his only, his well-beloved, Son, to assume the nature and become the brother of apostate man, that he might be his redeemer, by a life of suffering obedience, and an agonizing death upon the cross! "In this," says the apostle, "is love!" It is the grandest display, that ever was, or ever will be made of God as Love. It exceeds, and swallows up all the thoughts of men; and even of angels, who "desire to look down into these things" with unceasing admiration and rapturous delight.

Let it also be carefully observed, that the centre of these adorable wonders of divine mercy is not fixed in the circumstance of Christ, as *incarnate*, dying on the cross for sinners; but in the *incarnation* of the only begotten Son of God, that he *might* thus suffer and die for them!

We now therefore consider the Saviour as come into the world; his name "EMMANUEL, God with "us;" his humiliation, obedience, and sufferings accomplished. We next contemplate him rising from the grave, ascending into heaven; and in our nature "appearing in the presence of God for us," as our High Priest and Advocate; exalted to the mediatorial throne, reigning over all creatures, and possessed of all power and fulness, for the salvation of every sinner "who comes to God by "him."

Had men known their real situation and character; and had it been intimated, that reconciliation to God, recovery to holiness, and admission

to everlasting felicity might *possibly* be attained, by journeying to some remote inhospitable region, and performing certain arduous conditions: none would have acted *reasonably* who hesitated to go in search of this invaluable advantage. In such a concern, all other pursuits ought to be relinquished or suspended, and every danger or hardship disregarded: no delay should be admitted, but all ought immediately to set out for the appointed place, and communicate the interesting report to others, till it spread through the whole earth, as the most rejoicing tidings, which ever reached the ears of sinful man.

But the Lord knew that we were not thus *reasonable*; nay, that we were wholly indisposed to regard distant rumours, or to make inconvenient inquiries about salvation. He therefore, according to the purposes of his boundless love, appointed a number of reconciled sinners to execute "the "ministry of reconciliation," by going abroad into the world, and "preaching the gospel to every "creature." He invested them with miraculous powers, and inspired them with holy affections; he prepared them for patient sufferings and unwearied labours, and sent them with the glad tidings of his grace to sinners of every description, language, or climate. He ordered them not only to state and confirm the truths of Christianity; but to warn, invite, persuade, expostulate, and "beseech" sinners, in his name, "to be reconciled "to God." In this embassy, the vilest blasphemer, oppressor, murderer, and persecutor, is included; not even the hoary-headed profligate is excepted! "All things are ready:" all men every where are

" commanded to repent," and invited " to believe " in the Son of God:" nor is it possible that a sinner can want any thing which is not promised to all who seek it by earnest prayer.

Miraculous powers have indeed long since been withdrawn: but the same ministry of reconciliation is continued: nor does any thing at this day so much prevent the gospel from spreading throughout the earth, as the disinclination to receive it which is universally manifested. Every heart is closed against the divine message, by self-flattering prejudices and carnal affections; men of all nations and orders unite in opposing its admission among them; and the events recorded in the Acts of the apostles have, in this respect, taken place again and again, as often as the unadulterated gospel of Christ has been sent to those parts of the world which were before unacquainted with it.

This may suggest a proper answer to the objections of infidels against revelation, on the ground of its not being universal. The Lord indeed is not bound to vouchsafe unmerited benefits to all, or to any of his creatures. " May he not do what " he will with his own?" The objection therefore is replete with presumption. Yet it may also be observed, that ministers are commissioned and instructed to use their utmost endeavours, that the knowledge of the gospel may be rendered universal; and that numbers have been, and still are, ready, at any personal risk, to attempt it: but the lusts of men raise such barriers against them, as nothing but Omnipotence can surmount or remove. Even in this Christian land, the genuine religion of the Bible scarcely ever finds admission

into any place, but in the midst of opposition, contempt, and reproach: and no man should attempt to preach it, without standing prepared for degradation of character, or exclusion from preferments which he might otherwise have expected. Many friends to the truth are so influenced by this consideration, that they bring forward the peculiar doctrines of the gospel with a cautious hand, in hopes to insinuate them almost imperceptibly: and few of those who now "glory in the cross of "Christ" will deny, that once their hearts greatly disliked that humiliating subject.

Yet still our God perseveres in sending his message to sinners, even forcing it upon their attention, and requiring his ministers to venture their scorn and resentment, by their intrusions and importunity! And at last, when the carnal heart still persists in rejecting the gracious proposal, "of his great love wherewith he loved them, even "when they were dead in sins, he quickens them" by his grace; and makes them "willing in the "day of his power." When therefore we affirm that GOD IS LOVE, we may apply it, to the love of the Father, in giving his only Son to become our Saviour; to the love of the Son, in assuming our nature, coming into this sinful world, and dying on the cross for our sins, that he might be our all-prevailing Advocate; and to the love of the Spirit, in regenerating, sanctifying, and comforting our hearts: that so "Glory may be to the Father, and "to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost, as it was in "the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world "without end: Amen."

It would lead us too far to expatiate on the va-

rious instances of the Lord's unspeakable love to his believing people; his condescending regard to their minutest concerns; his tender sympathy with them in all their trials; his readiness to forgive even their renewed offences, and to "restore "to them the joy of his salvation;" his providential care in restraining their enemies, moderating their temptations, supplying their wants, and answering their prayers; his kind acceptance of their feeble services; the consolations he affords them, especially in trouble; and his marvellous interposition in rendering their sufferings most efficacious medicines, and "the king of terrors" a messenger of peace. These and many other topics might be enlarged on, to illustrate the proposition that GOD IS LOVE. But we must proceed,

III. To mention some perverse inferences which are frequently made from the text. 'If God be 'love,' say some men, 'may we not conclude that 'he will not make his creatures miserable?' Now this strange inference not only contradicts the general tenour of scripture, the divine revelation of which it supposes; but it is refuted by undeniable facts: for most certainly sinful creatures do suffer many and great miseries. Not to mention the instances recorded in the sacred volume, concerning the Lord's dealings with fallen angels and sinful men; can we live in the world, and not both witness and feel the effects of the divine displeasure against transgressors? Are not whole cities and nations desolated by the scourge of war, or by famines, pestilences, and earthquakes? Do not various diseases continually sweep immense multitudes into the grave, after enduring most excruci-

ating pains? Are not the survivors bereaved of their choicest comforts, and penetrated with exquisite anguish? Is not the earth, in every part filled with sighs, tears, groans, and bitter complaints? And are not all these afflictions the appointment of God, as punishments of sin, comprised in the first sentence denounced on fallen man, "In sorrow shalt thou eat bread all the days "of thy life, till thou return to the ground; for "dust thou art, and to dust shalt thou return."[1]

These sufferings are indeed turned into blessings to believers, and they are often useful in bringing sinners to repentance; but in themselves they are miseries, and frequently arise by natural consequence from men's vices: so that it is most evident that God doth punish sin with great severity. Hence we may learn, that we cannot judge concerning his conduct from our own duty in apparently similar cases. In our private capacity, we ought not to inflict misery, or withhold relief when we are able to afford it, on account of any provocations whatever: but the duty of magistrates, in respect of malefactors, much more resembles the case under consideration. We should, however, frame to ourselves the most deplorable scenes imaginable; and then inquire whether a benevolent man would not have prevented or relieved such miseries, if it had been in his power? And the answer to this inquiry must convince every one, who does not deny the superintending providence of God, or blaspheme his name, that we are incompetent judges on such subjects.

[1] Gen. iii. 16—19.

Yet many, who will not argue against these conclusions, would infer from the text, that God will not make any of his creatures finally and eternally miserable. But the deduction ought to be this: 'GOD is LOVE; therefore he will not cause any 'creature to suffer, unless some wise, holy, and 'benevolent purpose can be answered by its suf-'ferings.' It would not consist with infinite love to give one moment's *needless* uneasiness; and it *may* consist with infinite love to make sinners eternally miserable, if the glory of God, and the interests of the universe through eternal ages render it indispensably necessary. Facts demonstrate, to all who allow God to be infinite in justice and goodness, that durable sufferings may be inflicted consistently with those perfections. Complicated and long-continued miseries are very common; and death, the most dreaded of all temporal evils, cannot possibly be avoided. This seems to bring matters to extremities: for, if the greatest punishment which God hath threatened to inflict on sinners in this world, never fails to be executed; who can prove, or even probably conjecture, that the Lord will not accomplish his most tremendous denunciations of eternal misery? He is TRUTH as well as LOVE: and will any man seriously attempt to exalt his love by denying his truth? He hath said, that "the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from "heaven in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them "that know not God, and that obey not the gos-"pel of our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall be pun-"ished with everlasting destruction;" for "they "shall go away into everlasting punishment."[1]

[1] Matt. xxv. 46. 2 Thess. i. 8.

And surely "God is not a man that he should lie: "hath he said, and shall he not do it? hath he "spoken, and shall he not make it good?"[1]

The grandest display of the love of God doth equally declare his justice and holiness: and will not men allow that he is LOVE: unless he will, as it were, abdicate his throne, dishonour his name, and neglect the interests of his obedient subjects, in order to preserve impenitent rebels from deserved punishment? These reflections ought rather to convince us, that there is a malignity in sin, of which men are not aware; seeing God so terribly threatens and severely punishes his offending creatures, and yet rescues a penitent remnant in so stupendous a manner.

But some still contend that God will save all *sincere* persons, each in his own way: and they support this antiscriptural opinion by the words of our text.—Leaving at present the case of those who never were favoured with the clear light of divine revelation; let it be observed, that if they who are fully informed, or might be did they properly improve their advantages, persist in neglecting the way of salvation revealed in the scriptures, to depend on their moral virtues, rational schemes, or self-invented observances; if they treat the truth of God as a lie, and count that wisdom which angels adore, to be "foolishness;" if they regard the stupendous love of God in giving his Son to be the Saviour of the world as needless; and then pretend that he will condemn no man for unavoidable errors: let them look to it, for evil is before

[1] Numb. xxiii. 19.

them. The whole scripture declares unbelief to be the offspring of pride and the love of sin: and that such men continue under the unqualified sentence of final condemnation.

Sincerity is an ambiguous term: *sincerely* to hate infinite good and despise infinite excellency; and thus to be very *sincere* in "fighting against "God" and persecuting his saints; nay, sincerity in supporting the tenets of philosophy and morality, or superstition, against the sure testimony of God; is very different from sincere repentance, faith in Christ, love of his people, and obedience to his commands. Yet men, either *artfully* or *ignorantly*, confound these distinct ideas; and then pretend that *sincerity* is all that is necessary to salvation!

But this short specimen must suffice; though many more false inferences from the text might be mentioned. The wise man has, however, summed them all up in one verse: "Because sentence "against an evil work is not executed speedily, "therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully "set in them to do evil."[1]

IV. Let us, in the last place, make some practical use of the subject.

The view of the unfathomable love of God, which has been given, should increase men's abhorrence of sin and dread of its consequences. The more glorious and excellent the Lord appears to be, the greater degree of odiousness must be contained in every transgression against him; and crimes committed under the clear light of the gospel must, on that account be peculiarly inexcusable. While,

[1] Eccles. viii. 11.

therefore, sinners should take warning to flee from the wrath to come, (for "how will they escape if "they neglect so great salvation," and harden themselves in disobedience because our God is merciful ?) it is incumbent on us all to humble ourselves more and more for all our numberless offences, as most hateful and unreasonable, because committed against infinite goodness and excellency.

On the other hand the subject is most delightfully suited to encourage the poor trembling penitent, how many or heinous soever his sins may have been. Poor desponding soul, remember that GOD IS LOVE. Consider what he hath done to make way for the honourable exercise of his mercy. There were two obstacles in the way of our felicity; namely, his justice and our proud obstinacy. He hath removed the former by "not sparing his own "Son," but giving him a sacrifice for our sins; and he overcomes the latter when he "gives us repen- "tance to the acknowledging of the truth." If then thou dost now submit to his righteousness, confess thy sins, and apply for salvation according to his merciful invitations; thou mayest assuredly expect a gracious reception: for he who commended his love to his enemies, by giving his own Son to die for them, cannot reject the weeping contrite supplicant, who pleads the all-prevailing name of Jesus, in humble faith, and fervent desires of finding mercy and grace through him.

Here again we may learn the standard of true excellency. The most shining characters, which genius hath selected to immortalize, have commonly been illustriously mischievous; and the unqualified admiration, with which they are often

mentioned, exceedingly misleads inexperienced youth. But GOD IS LOVE; and, the more we resemble and imitate him in this endearing attribute, the greater real excellency we unquestionably possess. Let us then be "followers of God," and "walk in love," after his pattern, in all the various displays of it which have been considered: then we shall certainly be known and approved as his children, and found meet for the eternal inheritance of his heavenly kingdom.

Finally, if we be conscious of having "fled for "refuge to lay hold on the hope set before us" in the gospel, let us receive the trials allotted us as the wise and holy appointments of divine love; let us not judge of the Lord's dispensations by our feelings or reasonings, but by his holy word; and let us submit to his will, whatever he may withhold, take away or inflict; assured that he manages all our concerns in that manner which is most conducive to our eternal interests, and best suited to illustrate the riches of his paternal liberality.

SERMON V.

ACTS XXVI. 19, 20.

Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision: but shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judea, and then to the gentiles, that they should repent, and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance.

The propriety and address of St. Paul's speech before Agrippa, Festus, and that august assembly, in whose presence he stood as the prisoner of Jesus Christ, have been generally admired: but the faithfulness and courage, with which he pleaded the cause of the gospel, are perhaps still more deserving of our attention. He paid no court to his illustrious auditors: he attempted not to ingratiate himself with them, or even to shun their contempt or aversion; while he used the most effectual means of convincing them, not only that Jesus was the promised Messiah, but that faith in him was absolutely necessary to salvation, and that all men without exception ought to "repent, "and turn to God, and do works meet for re- "pentance."

Having given a brief narration of his own miraculous conversion, he produced his commission to preach the gospel to the gentiles; "I have ap- "peared unto thee," says the divine Saviour, "to

"make thee a minister and a witness, both of "these things which thou hast seen, and of those "things in the which I will appear unto thee; "delivering thee from the people and from the "gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, to open "their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to "light, and from the power of Satan unto God, "that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and "inheritance among them which are sanctified by "faith that is in me. Whereupon," says the apostle, "I was not disobedient unto the hea-"venly vision, but shewed," first to the Jews and then to the gentiles, "that they should repent "and turn to God, and do works meet for repent-"ance." In doing this, "he was not disobedient "to the heavenly vision:" for, in his view of Christianity, these practical subjects perfectly accorded with the doctrines of faith and grace. The several Christian graces may, and should, be *distinguished,* as they have their appropriate nature and use; but they cannot be *separated* in the person who possesses them. For instance, an impenitent believer, and an unbelieving penitent are ideal characters: true faith is a penitent faith, and true repentance is believing repentance: yet the nature and use of repentance and faith should be plainly distinguished. This will appear more evidently, while from the text we take occasion to consider,

I. The importance of the subject, as it appears from the scriptures:

II. Certain things which are implied in it:

III. The peculiar nature of repentance and turning unto God:

IV. And lastly, The works meet for repentance.

I. Let me call your attention, my brethren, to the importance or prominence of this subject, as it appears from the scriptures, especially from the New Testament.

John the Baptist was the predicted forerunner of the Messiah, who was sent to prepare the way of the Lord, when he came in human nature among his ancient people the Jews: but how did he execute his important office? He came preaching, "Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at "hand." Let me intreat your serious attention to this circumstance. Notwithstanding the advantages of that favoured nation, with all their notions and form of godliness, there was no order of men, no religious sect, no individual whatever, that did not want repentance, as a preparation for welcoming the Messiah, and sharing the blessings of his spiritual kingdom. Insomuch, that the Baptist said to the Pharisees, as well as to the Sadducees, "O generation of vipers, who hath warned "you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring "forth therefore fruits meet for repentance: and "think not to say within yourselves, We have "Abraham to our father."[1]—Not long after, our Lord himself condescended to preach the gospel; and he too said, "Repent, for the kingdom of "heaven is at hand." When the apostles went forth at his command, they "preached every where "that men should repent:" and it appears from part of his discourse to the seventy disciples, that

[1] Matt. iii. 7—10.

they were charged with the same commission; for he said on that occasion, "Wo unto thee, "Chorazin, wo unto thee, Bethsaida; for, if the "mighty works had been done in Tyre and Sidon "which have been done in thee, they had a great "while ago repented, sitting in sackcloth and "ashes."[1]

Does our Lord say in one place, "The Son of "man came to seek and to save that which was "lost?" He elsewhere explains it, "I came not "to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." Does the good Shepherd rejoice and call his friends to rejoice with him, when he has brought home the lost sheep? "So likewise is there joy in "heaven," even "among the angels of God," "over one sinner that repenteth:" and, when the prodigal, returning to his father, was graciously welcomed, all the family was called on to rejoice; "for this, my son, was lost and is found, was dead "and is alive."

On the other hand Christ "upbraided the cities "in which his mighty works had been done, be-"cause they repented not." He told the people, that "the men of Nineveh would rise up in judg-"ment with that generation and condemn it; be-"cause they repented at the preaching of Jonas: "and behold a greater than Jonas was there." He warned the Jews that, "except they repented, "they would all likewise perish." And he summed up the reasons of his gentleness to notorious sinners, and his severity in rebuking the Pharisees, in this remarkable passage: "A certain man had

[1] Luke x. 10—14.

" two sons; and he came to the first and said, Son, " go work to-day in my vineyard. He answered " I will not: but afterward he repented and went. " And he came to the second and said likewise: " and he answered and said, I go, Sir; and went " not. Whether of them twain did the will of his " father? They say unto him, The first. Jesus " saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, the pub- " licans and harlots go into the kingdom of heaven " before you. For John came to you in the way " of righteousness, and ye believed him not: but " the publicans and harlots believed him: and ye, " when ye had seen it, *repented* not afterwards, " *that ye might believe him!*"[1]

When our Lord was risen from the dead, and about to ascend unto the Father, he said to his apostles, " Go ye, preach the gospel to every crea- " ture: he that believeth and is baptized shall " be saved; and he that believeth not shall be " damned." And again, " Thus it is written, and " thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from " the dead the third day; and that repentance and " remission of sins should be preached in his name " unto all nations, beginning at Jerusalem."[2] We may know how the apostles understood their Lord, after they were filled with the Holy Ghost, if we attend to Peter, on the day of Pentecost, thus addressing the convinced Jews, " Repent and " be baptized, every one of you, in the name of " Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins:" and afterwards " Repent and be converted, *that your* " *sins may be blotted out;*" not *because your sins*

[1] Matt. xxi. 28—32. [2] Mark xvi. 15, 16. Luke xxiv. 46, 47.

are blotted out, as some modern systems seem to require: and why should men alter the order of scriptural exhortations, unless they mean to change the doctrine of scripture?[1]

When Peter related the circumstances of Cornelius's conversion, to his brethren at Jerusalem, they made this remark, "Then hath God also "to the gentiles granted repentance unto life."[2] When Paul at Athens, before the celebrated council of Areopagus, boldly exposed the ignorance of this renowned seat of pagan philosophy, he said, "The times of this ignorance God winked at, but "now commandeth *all men every where* to re- "pent."[3] And, stating the substance of his preaching before the elders of Ephesus, he thus expressed himself, "Testifying, both to the Jews and also "to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith "toward our Lord Jesus Christ."[4]—The same apostle, addressing the unbelieving Jews, thus expostulates with them, "Despisest thou the riches "of his goodness, and forbearance, and long suf- "fering; not knowing that the goodness of God "leadeth thee to repentance? but, after thy hard- "ness and impenitent heart, treasurest up unto "thyself wrath against the day of wrath?"[5] To the Corinthians he says, "Godly sorrow worketh "repentance unto salvation not to be repented of." And he expresses his fears that, when he came among them, he should "lament many which had "sinned and had not repented."[6] When he de-

[1] Acts ii. 38. iii. 13.
[2] Acts xi. 18.
[3] Acts xvii. 30.
[4] Acts xx. 21.
[5] Rom. iii. 4, 5.
[6] 2 Cor. vii. 10. xii. 21.

scribes the case of those who had sinned beyond the reach of mercy, he says, it is "impossible to "renew them to repentance:" and, on the other hand he directs Timothy "in meekness to instruct "those that opposed themselves, if peradventure "God would give them repentance to the acknow- "ledging of the truth." Where it is particularly to be remarked that repentance is considered as an essential preparation of mind for the reception of the truth, in order that they may "recover them- "selves out of the snare of the devil, who have "been taken captive by him at his will."[1] And this agrees with Peter's advice to Simon Magus, "Repent of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if "perhaps the thought of thy heart may be for- "given thee."[2]

These testimonies may probably be deemed more than sufficient: but let it be remembered, that we are not only concerned to prove the truth of the doctrine; it is also requisite to shew that repent- ance is indispensably necessary to salvation, and has been a matter of the last importance in religion under every dispensation. I shall, however, only select one passage from the Old Testament, with which to conclude this part of our subject. "I "will judge you, every one according to your "ways, saith the Lord God: repent and turn "yourselves from all your transgressions; so ini- "quity shall not be your ruin. Cast from you "all your transgressions, whereby ye have trans- "gressed, and make you a new heart and a new "spirit, for why will ye die, O house of Israel? For

[1] Heb. vi. 6. 2 Tim. ii. 25, 26. [2] Acts viii. 22.

" I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, " saith the Lord God; therefore repent, and turn " ye."[1]—Let us then consider,

II. Certain things which are implied in the language of the text, "That men should repent, " and turn to God, and do works meet for re- " pentance."

It is evidently implied in these words, that all men have sinned. God would never require any one to repent, who had never offended: yet "he " commands all men every where to repent." Sin is the transgression of the divine law, either by omission or commission, by defect or redundance, in thought, or word, or deed. Few indeed of the human race are acquainted with the full extent and spirituality of this perfect rule: yet all know more than they practise. Every man's conscience therefore must testify, if he allow himself time for reflection, that he has often wilfully neglected his known duty, and acted contrary to the conviction of his own mind, for the sake of some worldly object.

But "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven, " against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of " men;" and not merely against a few scandalous and enormous crimes. Many painful effects of the divine displeasure are experienced during the present life, which universally terminate in death: then the sinner's "body returns to the dust whence " it was taken, and the soul returns to God that " gave it." Criminals suffer many things previously to their trial; but the principal punish-

[1] Ezek. xviii. 30—32.

ment is subsequent to condemnation: thus "it is "appointed to men once to die, and after death "the judgment:" and we are "warned to flee from "the wrath *to come*," from which Jesus delivers his people, who must suffer and die like other men. The connexion therefore between sin and future condemnation to everlasting punishment, which cannot be escaped without repentance, is clearly implied in the language of the text.

Nor should we forget, that this condemnation is *merited;* for, unless sin deserves the punishment denounced, there can be no free mercy in remitting it. When the apostles were sentenced to stripes or death, for preaching the gospel, they might lament the injustice of the magistrates, but they could not repent of their own conduct in "obey-"ing God rather than men." Such persons as deem the laws of any country iniquitous, and their governors oppressive, will complain when they suffer for disobedience; but they cannot *repent*, unless they be convinced that they have been criminal. It would carry us too far, to illustrate the justice of God in the sentence pronounced against transgressors, by stating the rebellion, ingratitude, and enmity, which more or less connect with all our violations of the divine law: but surely, if crimes against our fellow creatures may deserve death, sins against our infinitely glorious Creator merit a punishment proportionably more dreadful. It is not commonly supposed that malefactors are sufficiently impartial, even if in other respects competent, to decide on the equity of the laws, or to amend the criminal code. It becomes us, therefore, rather to submit to the justice of God, and to

supplicate his mercy, than to reply against him, as if we "would condemn him that we may be "justified."

Our text implies likewise, that all have turned away from God. The characters of men are greatly diversified, but all "have forsaken the "Fountain of living waters, to hew out for them-"selves broken cisterns that can hold no water." Apostacy from God, or a refusal to render him the worship, love, gratitude, and obedience which he demands; alienation of heart from him, and a disposition to seek happiness any where, rather than in his favour and service, are universal. "All "we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned "every one to his own way." All men are become idolaters; they desire and delight supremely in the creature, in one form or other: while a self-sufficient independent spirit, a proneness to self-admiration, and to seek our own will or glory, as the ultimate end of all our actions, constitutes another kind of universal idolatry. Hence the necessity of repenting and turning to God, as the supreme object of our love, and the source of our felicity.

But we must also observe, that the text contains an intimation of mercy, and of the way in which the returning sinner may approach God with full confidence of a gracious reception. When a company of malefactors have been convicted, on the clearest evidence, of the most atrocious crimes; a command from their prince to own their guilt, and apply for mercy in a prescribed way, would be considered as an encouragement to expect a pardon. A hope would spring up in every breast; and,

if any who had unreservedly complied with this injunction, should at last be led to execution, they would think themselves trifled with, however just their punishment might otherwise be. Now the Lord has revealed himself as infinitely merciful to the fallen race of men; he has opened "a "new and living way," for our approach to him upon a throne of grace; he has invited us to draw near, and plead the name of our heavenly Advocate, and the merits of his atoning sacrifice; "he hath commanded all men every where to re- "pent:" and from these things we confidently infer that every one, without exception, who 'through 'grace obeys the call,' will be saved, by the free mercy of God in Christ Jesus. In short, if any man were sinless, and had no need of repentance; or if any were so sinful that repentance would avail him nothing; the general language of the text would not be suited to the case: but as all have sinned, and "with the Lord there is mercy and "plenteous redemption;" as no impenitent sinner can be saved, and no true penitent can be lost; therefore all men are exhorted and commanded "to repent and turn to God, and do works meet "for repentance."

III. We proceed to consider the peculiar nature of repentance and turning unto God.

The parable of the prodigal son was evidently intended as an illustration of this important subject: and the following verse is a most suitable introduction to our discussion of it. "*When he came* "*to himself*, he said, How many hired servants of "my father's have bread enough and to spare, and "I perish with hunger!" He had been infatuated,

he had acted as one in a delirium, or insane: but now the disorder is removed, he awakes as out of sleep, recovers the use of his faculties, and perceives his misery and danger. He sees every object in a new g t; he forms a very different judgment of his father's conduct, and of the rules and privileges of his family; of his own perverse behaviour, of his associates in vice, and in short of every thing connected with his character, situation, and prospects. From this revolution in his judgment, a total alteration takes place in his conduct. He considers the meanest servant of his father as comparatively happy, and himself as a wretched outcast deservedly perishing. His only hope in this extreme distress arises from a persuasion of the tender compassion of his father, whom before he had regarded as opposing his happiness: and he determines at all events to return to him, and seek to be reconciled, as the only hope of escaping destruction.

Thus the sinner, having long thought the Lord a hard master, and religion a wearisome service; and in vain sought liberty and pleasure in sin and folly; at length by rich mercy, is brought to himself, recovers from his delirium or fascination, to see his misery and lament his madness. Now he perceives that God is worthy of all love, obedience, and adoration; that his law is holy, just, and good; that his service is perfect freedom, and his favour, life and felicity; and that sin is but another name for folly, bondage, and ruin. He is convinced that the poorest believer is far happier than the most prosperous of the wicked, that his past conduct calls for the deepest humiliation, that his present situation is perilous in the extreme, and that his

only refuge is in the compasion of that God, against whom he has ungratefully rebelled. Influenced by such considerations, he arises from his grovelling indulgences and low pursuits; he repents and turns to God, with humble confessions and fervent prayers; he struggles through difficulties, resists temptations, and rises above dark desponding fears; and finds our heavenly Father far more ready to pardon, welcome, and bless him, than he could possibly have expected.

Yes, my brethren, many of you know the meaning of this parable by your own happy experience: and, comparing the bitterness of your sinful courses, with the peace and joy which you have found in believing, you are ready to say to others, "Come, taste, and see how gracious the "Lord is, and how blessed they are that trust in "him."—But are there not also among you some persons who never thus "came to themselves?" and have no acquaintance with the change that has been described? A few instances may indeed occur, where repentance and conversion have begun so early in life, and been matured so gradually, as to leave no distinct traces of this experience: but they who are strangers to it are almost universally ignorant of vital Christianity and its saving efficacy. True converts, however imperceptible their progress, are always conscious of desires and dispositions not natural to fallen man: and they are more prone to question, whether a change, wrought quietly and gradually, can be genuine, than to suppose a more distinct awakening to a sense of guilt and danger, not before felt, to be in general unnecessary.

pursuits and connexions, that he may seek liberty and happiness in the favour and service of his reconciled God. His former alienation is removed; he returns to him as his rest and refuge; and, through many conflicts and discouragements, he comes to God, to yield himself to his service, to become his spiritual worshipper, and, "as bought "with a price, to glorify him, in body and in spirit, "which are his."

In this manner all men are commanded to "repent, and turn to God" from their worldly idols and sinful pursuits. And do you not find, my friends, that, in keeping at a distance from "the "Fountain of living waters," you prolong your own distress and disappointment? Do none of you, while striving against conviction, or cleaving to your lusts and pleasures, and refusing to humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, experience such disquietude as the Psalmist has described? "When I kept silence, my bones "waxed old, through my roaring all the day long: "for day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: "my moisture is turned into the drought of sum-"mer."[1] Why should you pertinaciously refuse to hearken to the voice of Christ, and the admonitions of your own consciences? Why refuse to draw near to God, that he may draw near unto you? Do you not sometimes feel, though unwilling to own it, that the warnings and counsels of your ministers are reasonable, and that it would be your highest interest to comply with them? Are you not ready to say, "Go thy way at this time,

[1] Psal. xxxii. 3, 4.

"when I have a convenient season I will call for "thee?" But why do you delay to apply for relief, and embrace happiness? Have you not found the world to be vain and vexatious, and the pleasures of sin bitter and painful? Have not all endeavours "to establish your own righteousness," or overcome your own passions, habits, and temptations, proved wearisome and unsuccessful? Hear then the words of the sinner's Friend, while he speaks to you in accents of the tenderest love: "Where- "fore do ye spend money for that which is not "bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth "not? Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye "that which is good, and let your soul delight "itself in fatness. Incline your ear and come "unto me, hear and your soul shall live." "Seek "ye the Lord while he may be found; call ye upon "him while he is near: let the wicked forsake his "way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; "and let him return unto the Lord, and he will "have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he "will abundantly pardon."[1] Confess your sins, therefore, without reserve; forsake them without delay; renounce your former associates in ungodliness; "Come out from among them, and be ye "separate, and touch not the unclean thing, and I "will receive you, and will be a father to you, and "ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the "Lord Almighty."[2] "Cleanse your hands, ye "sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double- "minded: be afflicted, and mourn and weep; let "your laughter be turned into mourning, and

[1] Isai. lv. 2, 3, 6, 7. [2] 2 Cor. vi. 17, 18.

" your joy into heaviness; humble yourselves in " the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up."[1] Make no more vain excuses; pretend not that your sins have been few or small; be not afraid to view them in their full magnitude and malignity; trust only in the mercy of the Father, the atoning blood and prevailing mediation of the Son, and the powerful grace of the holy Spirit; return to the Lord with weeping and supplications; and speedily your sorrows shall be turned into joy, and your heaviness into glad songs of grateful praise.

But men not only should " repent and turn to " God;" we must also call on them " to do works " meet for repentance;" and this leads us,

IV. To consider what is meant by this clause of the text.

If a man truly repent of any misconduct which has proved injurious to himself or others, he would be glad, were it possible, to undo what he recollects with shame and remorse. This is indeed impracticable: yet frequently the effects may be prevented or counteracted: and this is a work meet for repentance, especially if it be done with much loss and self-denial. This consideration, however, may suggest a powerful inducement to early piety: for, even if the sinner should be spared, and live to repent in his riper years, he will seldom be able to prevent the mischievous effects of his youthful iniquities; and that, which is practicable and indispensable, will resemble " the cut- " ting off of a right hand, or the plucking out of " a right eye."

[1] James iv. 6—10.

He who has in any way defrauded others, cannot be thought "to do works meet for repentance," unless he makes restitution to the best of his ability and recollection; whatever mortifying or self-denying circumstances attend it: for, without this, he retains the wages of his crimes, and perpetuates his injustice.—But, as one vice often wastes the gains of another, restitution may be absolutely impracticable; and in many cases it is almost impossible to know to whom restitution should be made, even if a man is able and willing to make it. When therefore the apostle says, "Let him that stole "steal no more; but rather let him labour, work-"ing with his hands the thing which is good, that "he may have to give to him that needeth;"[1] he seems to counsel such persons to submit to hard labour and mean fare, that, by giving to the poor, they might make such restitution, as their circumstances allowed of: and this is certainly "a work "meet for repentance." Were this lowly, industrious, and self-denying conduct more common among professors of the gospel; they would more frequently be enabled "to adorn the doctrine of "Christ" by an unrequired restitution for wrongs, which the laws of men do not notice, but which a tender well-informed conscience cannot overlook. And, when wrong has been done, and the individuals who have been injured cannot be exactly ascertained, the poor, especially of the families which have been wronged, should be considered as best entitled to the restitution. This however, is certain, that the professed penitent himself, whe-

[1] Eph. iv. 28.

ther he have defrauded individuals or the public, cannot retain his unjust gain, either as a treasure to hoard up, or as a source of indulgence, without "putting an accursed thing among his own stuff, "and becoming an accursed thing like unto it."[1]— But we may have traduced the characters, poisoned the principles, or corrupted the morals of others, or in various ways injured them, if we have not robbed them of their property: and, though adequate restitution cannot be made, yet we should do all in our power to counteract the effects of our misconduct, and to promote their best interests; if we would evidence the sincerity of our repentance and faith, and of our love to God and man.

He that well understands the gospel of Christ, and the nature of genuine repentance, will readily perceive that forgiveness of injuries, and love of enemies, are peculiarly required by the words of the text. The man who refuses to forgive surely forgets his own need of forgiveness. And he, who will do nothing for his enemies, can have no proper sense of his own sinfulness, and of the love of God in reconciling us when enemies by the death of his Son. The view which the true penitent has of Christ, dying on the cross and praying for his murderers, will render it easy to him, to pity and love his most determined foes, "to do good to "them that hate him, and to pray for them that "despitefully use him and persecute him." These too are works meet for repentance; without which all tears, confessions, and even restitution, can never prove it genuine and unfeigned.

[1] Josh. vii. 11—15.

Patience under afflictions, contentment in our situation, thankfulness for mercies, and meekness under provocations, might be separately considered, did time permit. But, in general, an habitual walk in newness of life comprises the whole. "The "grace of God that bringeth salvation teaches us, "that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we "should live soberly, righteously, and godly in "this present world;" watching and praying against the sins which once had most entire dominion over us; redeeming our time and improving our talents, doing good to all men, especially to the household of faith; a circumspect conduct, and a constant attendance on the ordinances of God; a humble deportment in the family and community, as well as in the church; and a care to "exercise ourselves daily to have a "conscience void of offence towards God and "man:" these I say are "works meet for repent-"ance."—When the people asked John the Baptist what they should do in compliance with his exhortation to this effect, he did not require them to retire into deserts, or immure themselves in cloisters, nor even to torment themselves with excessive austerities; but he recommended liberal charity, strict integrity, and a harmless and exemplary conduct even in the station of publicans and soldiers.

But these hints must suffice, as every reflecting person will be able to branch out the general rules laid down, into a variety of particulars; and the grand use of preaching is to lead men to reflection.

Perhaps, however, I am addressing some persons who still object to the subject; and, confiding

in the rectitude of their hearts, and the undeviating virtue of their conduct, count the doctrine of repentance and conversion wholly foreign to their case. I have heard persons of this description gravely observe, that 'it would be much better to 'preach the necessity of a good life, than to dwell 'on repentance; except among the refuse of the 'species, of whom indeed little hope could be en-'tertained.' But how can such men help seeing, that they only repeat the objections of the Pharisees against Christ himself, and exactly resemble these antient opposers of the gospel? I would however, at present only say; If any one of you had a son, whom you had tenderly treated from his birth, and who should yet act with as much disregard to your counsel and authority, as you have done to those of your Creator, would you not think that he ought to repent of his ungrateful behaviour? And have you then no cause for repentance? Verily, whatever you may think, it will hereafter appear that there "is joy in heaven over "one sinner that repenteth, more than over nine-"ty and nine (such) just persons that need no re-"pentance."—But does any one say, 'I own in 'general that I ought to repent; yet I find a 'strange insensibility of conscience, and backward-'ness to humble myself before God, or to renounce 'the pleasures of sin; and a grievous propensity 'to delay that necessary business, till my alarms 'and convictions vanish without any abiding ef-'fect?' To you, my friend, I would observe that repentance is the gift of God; and that Jesus is exalted "to give repentance and remission of "sins." Pray therefore to the Lord to 'give you

'repentance and his holy Spirit;' cry in the language of Ephraim, "Turn thou me, and I shall be "turned;" and beg of him to take away the heart of stone, and to give the heart of flesh. Meditate also continually on the sufferings of Christ, the dignity of the sufferer, and the exhibition which God hath made to us, in that great transaction, both of his holy hatred of sin, and of his compassionate love of sinners. This is the most effectual cure for a hard heart and an unfeeling conscience. "I will pour upon them the Spirit of "grace and supplication, and they shall look on "me whom they have pierced, and mourn."[1]

But remember that life is uncertain; and that God, whom thou provokest, especially by impenitence, is the arbiter of thy life and death. The Holy Ghost saith, "To-day, if ye will hear his "voice, harden not your hearts." Even if your days should be prolonged, you may be given over to final obduracy; and continuance in sin will be sure to increase the anguish of repentance, should you at last, by a miracle of mercy, be plucked as a brand out of the burning.

Above all, my fellow sinners, beware lest you be deceived with a false repentance; for nothing so effectually hardens men in impenitence. Some transient convictions, fears, and sorrows; some partial reformation; a new creed, sect, or form of religion; enthusiastic joys and comforts, or delusive fancies of visions and revelations; frequently satisfy men's consciences and fill them with spiritual pride, while their hearts remain un-

[1] Zech. xii. 10.

changed, the root of sin unmortified, and no works are found meet for repentance!—Beware also of the partial despairing repentance of Judas; of the temporary repentance of king Saul; of the extorted repentance of Pharoah; and of the case of him who was "almost persuaded to be a Chris-"tian."—Nor let it be imagined, that repentance and conversion to God are confined to the beginning of a religious profession: for, as long as we continue sinful and prone to depart from the Lord, they must constitute our habitual practice, form the dispositions of our hearts, and influence all our tempers and our conduct.

On the other hand, let not the contrite mourner for sin despond. Remember, poor trembling penitent, that "there is joy among the angels of "God over one sinner that repenteth." Yea, the Lord of angels "sees of the travail of his soul and "is satisfied." Only beseech Him that thy repentance may be genuine, and thy conversion entire: thus thou wilt surely find that he is "ready to "forgive and plenteous in mercy;" and ere long thou wilt joyfully sing, "O Lord, I will praise "thee; though thou wast angry with me, thine "anger is turned away and thou comfortest me." For "they that sow in tears shall reap in joy." "Let then the hearts of those rejoice that seek "the Lord."

Finally, my Christian brethren, while you are careful in other respects "to do works meet for "repentance," let me exhort you to enter into the spirit of the gospel by using every means and encouraging every endeavour, to bring sinners to repentance; and to welcome every penitent with

cordial joy and affection, as Ananias did the converted persecutor, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus "hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy "sight." Thus you will manifest the excellency of your principles, and be honoured as instruments in promoting that cause for which the divine Saviour came into the world and shed his blood upon the cross; and all men will know that you are his true disciples.

SERMON VI.

2 CORINTHIANS V. 17.

If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.

The dangers to which the church at Corinth was exposed, from plausible false teachers, obliged the apostle to use such methods of re-establishing his authority, as he apprehended might be misunderstood and censured: he therefore says, "Whether "we be beside ourselves it is to God, or whether "we be sober it is for your cause."—The zealous servants of God have constantly been slighted and despised, as "beside themselves;" nay, the Son of God, the perfection of wisdom and excellency, was involved in the same charge, even from his friends and relations as well as from his enemies.[1] The apostle therefore would not be greatly disquieted when Festus said, "Paul thou art beside "thyself, much learning doth make thee mad," nor even when his Corinthian converts concurred in the same sentiment.

'But,' says the apostle, 'Both the ardour that 'gives occasion to such imputations, and the wis-'dom which regulates its effects, spring from re-'gard to the glory of God, and affectionate longing

[1] 2 Kings ix. 11. Jer. xxix. 26, 27. Hos. ix. 7. Mark iii. 21. John x. 20.

'after your souls: "For the love of Christ con-
'straineth us; because we thus judge, that if one
'died for all then were all dead; and that he died
'for all, that they which live should not hence-
'forth live unto themselves, but unto him which
'died for them and rose again. Wherefore hence-
'forth know we no man after the flesh, yea,
'though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet
'now henceforth know we him no more."' Even the brethren or nearest friends of Christ himself, according to the flesh, might not be regarded by the apostles in dispensing instructions, reproofs, censures, or encouragements; but they were constrained, by love to him who had died for them, to do all things with unbiassed impartiality. In like manner, no ties of blood, friendship, or even gratitude, must influence the servant of Christ, in the discharge of his pastoral office. In this respect even relations, benefactors, and patrons must be disregarded, if we would approve ourselves to be indeed the genuine successors of the apostles in the sacred ministry. "Therefore," saith St. Paul, "if any man be in Christ he is a new creature: old "things are passed away; behold all things are "become new: and all things are of God who hath "reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ."

The text suggests the following subjects to our consideration,

I. The apostle's description of a real Christian; "If any man be *in Christ:*"

II. The change which every real Christian has experienced; "He is a new creature:"

III. The effects of this change; "Old things are "passed away; behold, all things are become new."

I. We consider the apostle's description of a real Christian: "If any man be *in Christ*."

This expression may appear singular to many who are called Christians, but it is the uniform language of the New Testament: and, "if any "man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God." New terms imperceptibly introduce new doctrines; nor has any subtilty of Satan or his servants better succeeded, in "privily bringing in damnable "heresies," than that of modernizing the language of divinity.

"There is therefore now no condemnation to "them that are *in Christ Jesus*." "I knew a man "*in Christ* fourteen years ago." "He was also "*in Christ* before me." "Of whom are ye *in* "*Christ Jesus*, who of God is made unto us wis- "dom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and "redemption."[1] "That we might be made the "righteousness of God *in him*." Many of the epistles also are addressed "to the saints *in Christ* "*Jesus*," "or to the church—*in* God the Father, "and *in* the Lord Jesus Christ." Which accords to the language of the prophet, "Israel shall be "saved *in the* LORD with an everlasting salvation." "Surely shall one say, *In the* LORD have I righ- "teousness and strength." "*In the* LORD shall "all the seed of Israel be justified and shall "glory."[2]

The apostle John also employs similar expressions: "And now, little children, abide *in him*:" "We are *in him* that is true, even *in his Son Jesus*

[1] Rom. viii. 1. xvi. 7, 1 Cor. i. 30. 2 Cor. xii. 2.

[2] Is. xlv. 17, 24, 25.

"*Christ*."[1] But the words of our Lord himself are most decisive: "He that eateth my flesh and "drinketh my blood, dwelleth *in me* and I in "him."[2] Accordingly when we administer the Lord's supper, that outward sign of this inward life of faith in a crucified Saviour, we pray 'that 'we may so eat the flesh of Christ, and drink his 'blood;—that we may *dwell in him and he in us*.' "Neither," saith our divine Redeemer, when interceding for his disciples, "pray I for these alone, "but for them also which shall believe on me "through their word; that they all may be one, "as thou, Father, art *in me, and I in thee, that* "*they also may be one in us*."[3]

But we must explain this language, and shew its propriety and energy; lest it should be thought, that the whole argument rests upon our translation of the original particles. St. Paul says, "The "wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is "eternal life *through*," or *in* "Christ Jesus our "Lord:" and St. John, "This is the record that "God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is "in his Son: he that hath the Son hath life, and "he that hath not the Son of God hath not life."[4] The salvation of Christ is completed as far as his mediatory work is concerned: but who are they that shall eventually be "saved from wrath by "him?" To this question the scripture answers with the most decided precision, "they that re- "ceive him," "they that believe in him," "they "that are found *in him*."—Union with Christ is

[1] 1 John ii. 28. v. 20.
[2] John vi. 56.
[3] John xvii. 20—23.
[4] Rom. vi. 23. 1 John v. 11, 12.

necessary in order to communion with him: he saves all those, and those only, who thus stand related to him.

According to the illustrations of scripture, the believer is *in Christ*, as the stone is in the building. God is preparing a spiritual temple, in which he may dwell and be glorified for ever. The person of Christ is the precious foundation and corner-stone of this temple, and believers "come to him, "and as living stones are built up a spiritual "house," "a habitation of God through the "Spirit."[1]—But this emblem, taken from things wholly inanimate, only represents our dependence on Christ, and consecration to God through him: we therefore learn more fully the nature of this mystical union, by the parable of the vine and its branches. Mere nominal Christians continue unfruitful; and at length are taken away, withered, and gathered to be burned: but true believers are vitally united to him, and abide in him, by the quickening and fructifying influences of the Holy Spirit.[2]—Yet even this illustration falls short of fully elucidating the subject: nay, the nearest of all relative unions does not entirely answer to it; for believers are *in Christ*, as the members are in the human body. He is the Head of the church, and every Christian is a part of his mystical body, bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh; and the Holy Spirit dwells in all believers, as the life and soul of this mystical body. They live spiritually by virtue of this union with their Head; they are placed under his guidance and authority; have one

[1] 1 Pet. ii. 4—8. Eph. ii. 20—22 [2] John xv. 1—8.

common interest, and fill up their stations in the church for the benefit of the whole.[1] According to the remarkable words of the apostle, "I am "crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet "not I, but Christ liveth in me." "Your life is "hid with Christ in God; when Christ, who is our "life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with "him in glory."[2]

There is, however, another method of illustrating the subject, which may help us to explain the way in which sinners attain to so high an honour, and so blessed a distinction. The believer is *in Christ*, as Noah was in the ark. "By faith Noah being "warned of God, moved with fear, prepared an "ark."[3] He believed the sure testimony of God, both respecting the deluge and the appointed method of preservation; he feared the impending judgment, and revered the justice and power of God; and thus he was moved to follow his directions. To prepare the ark was a vast undertaking: his labour and expense must have been exceedingly great, and his perseverance, amidst the scorn and hatred of an unbelieving world, most exemplary. But when the deluge came, he was found *in the ark*, and preserved to be the progenitor of a new race of men: and even of the promised Redeemer, on whom doubtless his faith had ultimately been placed: while all the rest of the human species, however distinguished, or to whatever refuges they fled, were swept away with one common desolation. But had he bestowed as much pains and

[1] 1 Cor. xii. 12—31. [2] Gal. ii. 20. Col. iii. 3, 4.
[3] Heb. xi. 7. 1 Pet. iii. 20.

expense in building a lofty tower on a high mountain, following the dictates of his own wisdom; he would have shared the common doom; as they will, who "go about to establish their own righte-"ousness," instead of diligently seeking the salvation of God. For, like Noah, the sinner hearing of "the wrath of God revealed from heaven against "all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men," believing the divine record "is moved with fear," and takes warning "to flee from the wrath to "come." He hears also of Christ, the true ark, which God himself hath provided; and renouncing all other confidences, by faith he betakes himself to this sure refuge, applies for admission, and endures the self-denial, contempt, and persecution to which this may expose him. And whatever difficulties he may now encounter; his wisdom will be acknowledged and his felicity envied, when no unbeliever shall find any shelter from the overwhelming deluge of divine vengeance, which perhaps he now despises or blasphemes.

Under the Mosaic dispensation, the *guiltless* manslayer was exposed to the sword of the avenger of blood: but cities of refuge were provided, to which he might flee for shelter. Yet in this perilous situation an Israelite had no choice: he must scarcely turn back to take his clothes, and by no means go home to bid farewell to his dearest relatives: he must leave all his outward comforts, employments, and interests: he must flee without delay, and hardly stop for necessary refreshment: he must not yield to indolence, or sit down when weary; and could never think of loitering, to interfere with other men's business, to examine curiosities, or to

join in vain diversions. With all speed he must urge his course to the city of refuge; as if he had seen the avenger of blood with a drawn sword close behind, and heard him uttering most dreadful menaces. When he had gained the appointed asylum, he was required to abide there, at a distance from all his connexions, those excepted who chose to follow him; and this restriction continued, till the death of the high-priest set him at liberty from his confinement.

Thus the sinner, perceiving himself exposed to the wrath of God and the curse of his violated law, must "flee for refuge to lay hold on the hope set "before him" in the gospel. Without delay he must diligently use all the means of grace, and separate from the vain pursuits and pleasures of an unbelieving world. He must not give "sleep to his "eyes or slumber to his eyelids; but flee as a bird "from the snare of the fowler, and as a roe from "the hand of the hunter." He must "work out "his own salvation with fear and trembling," and earnestly apply for an interest in the great atonement; knowing that if death should previously overtake him, the avenging justice of God would prove the ruin of his immortal soul. And, when he has obtained a good hope of his acceptance, he must still keep close to this refuge; renouncing the society of all those that refuse to join with him in his new course of life; remembering that, "if any "man love father, or mother, wife, or children, "more than Christ, he cannot be his disciple."

Thus the true believer is *in Christ*, as in the city of refuge: and, if we do not wish to deceive ourselves, we may know whether our experience,

conduct, and confidence bear any resemblance to this representation; and whether we desire to join the apostle in saying, "Yea, doubtless, I count all "things but loss, for the excellency of the know- "ledge of Christ Jesus, my Lord:—I count them "but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found "*in him*, not having mine own righteousness which "is of the law, but that which is through the faith "of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by "faith."[1]

He that is thus in Christ is finally delivered from condemnation; all his sins are blotted out and buried in the depths of the sea; "being justified "by faith, he hath peace with God;" to whom being reconciled when an enemy "by the death of "his Son, he shall be saved by his life." He is admitted into a covenant of friendship with the everlasting God, and adopted into his family as a son and heir. "All things work together for his "good," and "nothing shall separate him from the "love of Christ." All the promises without exception belong to him, and shall be fulfilled in due season and order; "for," says the apostle, "all things are your's, and ye are Christ's, and "Christ is God's."—We consider, then,

II. The inward change, which every real Christian has experienced: "He is a new creature."

Whether any one were previously a Jew or a gentile: whether he were moral, civil, learned, ingenious, devout, zealous, or superstitious and enthusiastical, a sceptical reasoner, or a scoffing infidel; when he becomes a Christian, "he is a new

[1] Phil. iii. 8, 9.

"creature."—"We are his workmanship, created "in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God "hath before ordained that we should walk in "them." "For in Christ Jesus neither circum-"cision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, "but a new creature."[1] What are we then to understand by these energetic expressions? Will any sensible man maintain, that a new creed or name may properly be called "a new creation?" Will he affirm that nothing more was meant than a decent moral conduct, or an external reformation? Does this amount to any thing more than the cleansing of "the outside," while the heart remains full of pollution? Such frigid interpretations must be merely the word of man; for "the word of God "is quick and powerful, sharper than any two-"edged sword; piercing even to the dividing "asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and "marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and "intents of the heart."[2]

It is however, proper to observe, that he who is a new creature continues, in many respects, the same as before. His body with all its members and senses is the same; though he finds himself disposed to make a new use of it: his soul and all his faculties are the same, though his judgment and affections are entirely changed. He possesses his former measure of capacity and learning, with the peculiarity of his genius and the original complexion of his mind. The man of enlarged powers does not lose that superiority of talent; while he is content to be thought "a fool for Christ's sake,"

[1] Gal. vi. 15. Eph. ii. 10. [2] Heb. iv. 12. Jer. xxiii. 29.

to seek wisdom from him with the teachableness of a little child, and to devote all his endowments to the glory of the Giver. The man of slender abilities and illiterate education makes no advances in learning or ingenuity, except as he becomes of "good understanding in the way of godliness." No alteration takes place in any person's relative situation or rank in society: he can claim no additional civil immunities or advancement, when he is "in Christ a new creature:" nor does he forfeit any of his rights; though persecution may deprive him of them, and love of Christ make him willing to renounce them. In general he abides in his calling, if lawful; but endeavours to fill it up in a new manner.

What then is especially intended?—Here again the scripture assists our inquiry by apt illustrations. "Ye were," says the apostle, "the servants "of sin, but ye obeyed from the heart that form "of doctrine which was delivered you."[1] Learned men generally agree, that the concluding words would be more exactly rendered, "into which ye were delivered;" alluding to the mould into which melted metal is poured, that it may thence take its intended fashion and impression. When vessels of silver have been thus formed again, they are as really *new*, as if the metal had just been brought from the mine. Thus sinners are, in themselves, "vessels of wrath fitted for de-"struction," bearing the image of fallen Adam, and disposed to imitate his rebellion and apostacy: but the new creation forms them into "vessels of

[1] Rom. vi. 17.

" mercy, prepared for glory," stamped with the image of Christ, " fitted for their Master's use, and " ready for every good work." They are the same men, yet new creatures.

The grafted tree also is in many respects the same as before: yet it is *a new* tree, and as the poet beautifully expresses it,

Miraturque novas frondes, et non sua poma.

'It wonders at its new leaves, and fruit that is not 'its own.'—Thus, when the word of truth is engrafted in the heart by the Holy Spirit, the same man becomes " a new creature," and his thoughts, words, and actions also become new.

The scriptural emblems of sinners, according to their different propensities, are taken from lions, tigers, foxes, swine, and serpents, and other fierce, crafty, ravenous, or filthy animals: but a sheep or a dove is the emblem of a Christian; and the new creation effects this marvellous change. " The " wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leo- " pard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf, " and the young lion, and the fatling together; " and a little child shall lead them. And the cow " and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall " lie down together, and the lion shall eat straw " like the ox: and the sucking child shall play " on the hole of the asp; and the weaned child " shall put his hand on the cockatrice den: they " shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy moun- " tain."[1] Does not every man perceive that, if

[1] Isa. xi. 6—9.

Almighty God should dispose these animals to live together in perfect amity, as here described, they would be *new creatures;* though the same outward form, and many other peculiarities of each species should remain? And who can deny that, if the grace of God so change the ambitious, rapacious, covetous, fraudulent, contentious, revengeful, cruel, sensual, and profane, that they willingly live together, "in all the commandments and "ordinances of the Lord blameless," they are to all religious purposes "new creatures?"

Let any considerate and impartial man compare the character and spirit of St. Paul, before and after his conversion; and determine for himself, whether the apostle was not "a new creature." His body and soul, his abilities and ardent turn of mind, continued the same; but, in other respects, he differed as much from his former self as from any other man in the world. The change would probably appear as remarkable in the case of Matthew, Zaccheus, or Onesimus, had we as copious an account of them as we have of the apostle. Nay, the thief upon the cross gave evident proofs, that "the tree was made good;" for the fruit began to be good, and would doubtless have been abundant had his life been spared. Even when a man's outward conduct has been irreproachable, the internal change in his views, purposes, and desires, is clearly manifest to his own mind, though the effects be less visible to others.

The various metaphors, under which this new creation is spoken of in scripture, confirm this explanation. "A new heart will I give you, and "a new spirit will I put within you," saith the

Lord.[1] But reformation, without an inward change of disposition, would be a mere counterfeit of the promised blessing.—"Ye must be born again."—"Blessed be God who hath begotten us again to "a lively hope."[2] The allusion is made, in this common scriptural language, to the production of a creature which before had no separate existence, but now possesses life, has capacities of action and enjoyment, wants nourishment, and may be expected to grow to maturity: and it is the invariable rule of nature, that the offspring bears the image and inherits the propensities of the parent animal. The emphatical meaning of "being born again," "born of the Spirit," "born of God," must be very manifest: and, had our Lord only intended an outward ordinance or reformation, when he said, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be "born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God;" it could not have been denied that he had perplexed a plain subject by a needless obscurity of expression.

"You hath he quickened," saith the apostle, "who were dead in trespasses and sins." Man, as the Lord created him, possessed animal life and its propensities; as a rational creature, he was capable of actions and enjoyments of a higher order; and, as *spiritual*, he was capable of finding happiness in the love and service of God: but he has lost his *spiritual* life and is "dead in sin." Fallen angels possess the powers of reason to a very great degree: yet they are *spiritually dead*; they are incapable of loving and enjoying God, and finding

[1] Ezek. xi. 19, 20. xxxvi. 25—27.
[2] John iii. 1—8. 1 Pet. i. 3, 23.

happiness in his holy service: and, I am persuaded that sober reflection will convince any candid inquirer, that the most rational man living is, while unregenerate, as incapable of the pleasures which angels enjoy in heaven, as animals are of sharing the satisfactions of the philosopher. This appears in one remarkable circumstance: when any person renounces all other pursuits for the sake of religion, it is always supposed that he leads a joyless life, and is in danger of becoming melancholy; as if the felicity of "angels, and of the spirits of just "men made perfect," were wholly unsuited to man's nature on earth, and incapable of affording him delight!

The same internal renovation is called "the "circumcision of the heart to love the Lord;" and described under the image of "putting his law in "the *heart*, and writing it in the *inward* parts." "For the grace of God, which bringeth salvation, "teaches us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, "and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in "this present world."

This change begins the "renewing in the spirit "of our mind," the "transformation by the renew-"ing of our mind," "the putting off the old man," and "the putting on the new man:" for these expressions relate to the growth of the new creature, and the removal of every thing that retards it. So that *regeneration* is the beginning of *sanctification*, which signifies the *making of that person or thing holy, which was before unholy*.

We cannot, however, fully explain, or even comprehend, *the manner* in which the new nature is communicated. In general we may observe that,

as natural life subsists in every part of the animal, so spiritual life pervades all the faculties of the soul. It is light, knowledge, and judgment in the understanding; sensibility in the conscience; purity, spirituality, and fervour in the affections, and submission in the will: and this entire inward revolution produces proportionable effects upon the whole conduct and character of the real Christian. But this will appear more distinctly, while,

III. We consider the effects of the change: "Old things are passed away; behold, all things "are become new."

This language is general, and no exceptions are intimated.—He who has thus "passed from death "unto life" will find that his old sentiments and thoughts are vanished. His high opinion of himself, of his abilities, actions, and heart, are no more: he ceases to shine in his own eyes, and gradually discovers that he is "wretched, poor, "miserable, blind, and naked:" he is constrained to renounce all dependence on his wisdom and righteousness; to distrust his own heart as "de-"ceitful and desperately wicked;" and to abhor himself as a guilty polluted criminal. Nor can he ever again recover those lofty thoughts of himself, which once were natural to him.

His hard thoughts of the divine law, as unreasonably strict and severe, are passed away: and he can no longer entertain his former palliating notions concerning the evil of sin. He perceives the commandment to be holy, just, and good; and the transgression of it to be replete with ingratitude, rebellion, and contempt of God. He dares no longer impeach the divine justice and

goodness, in respect of the punishments denounced against sinners: his old thoughts and reasonings on these subjects are gone, and he is astonished at his own presumption, in having formerly indulged them.

His sentiments concerning the happiness to be enjoyed in worldly pleasures, and the gloom and melancholy of a religious life, are wholly changed. He can no longer think of eternity as uncertain or distant: and no temptation or discouragement can henceforth prevail with him, to give up his hope of everlasting life, to rest satisfied with a portion in this world, or to risk the tremendous consequences. "He looks not at the things which "are seen, but at the things which are not seen: "for the things which are seen are temporal, but "the things which are not seen are eternal."

His former thoughts of Christ and his salvation are passed away. He once despised the glorious Redeemer in his heart; perhaps he deemed those to be hypocrites or enthusiasts, who spoke in animated language of his love and preciousness: but these imaginations are no more; he is now ready to exclaim, "How great is his goodness! how "great is his beauty!" He "counts all but loss "for Christ," and fears exceedingly coming short of his salvation. He cannot think meanly of him, or be indifferent to his favour, cause, or glory; yet he continues dissatisfied with the degree of his admiring love and gratitude to his great benefactor.

His former opinions concerning the wise and happy among the sons of men are irrecoverably gone. He pities the very persons, whom he once

admired or envied; and he counts the despised and afflicted disciples of Christ "the excellent of "the earth, in whom is all his delight." He longs to share their privileges and felicity: nor could he recover his former aversion to them, even if he supposed that he should be for ever excluded from their company.

When any one is "in Christ a new creature," his old pursuits and pleasures also pass away.—As the man of business has done with the pastimes of childhood, so the believer ceases to relish those scenes of dissipated or sensual indulgence, which once were his element. He finds himself uneasy, when they come in his way: not only deeming them a criminal waste of time and money, and a wilful hindrance to serious reflection; but feeling them to be a chasm in his enjoyment, and an interruption to his comfort in communion with God, and in the company of his servants.

His conduct is still more decided in things directly evil. "How shall he that is dead to sin live "any longer therein?" He hates and dreads sin as his worst enemy: "His seed remaineth in him, "that he cannot sin, because he is born of God." He does not indeed forsake his lawful employments, but he gradually learns to follow them from new motives, and in a new manner; not from covetousness or on worldly principles, but as his duty, from love to God and man, and according to the precepts of the sacred scriptures.

It will readily be perceived, that the old companions of such a man will pass away. Even when relative duties and other causes render some intercourse with ungodly persons unavoidable, it will

become less cordial and intimate. When such opposite characters meet, one of them must be out of his element; all those associates therefore of the new convert's former years, who have no interest in continuing the acquaintance, will drop off, as leaves from the trees in autumn: and he will find that the society of his most agreeable old companions is become irksome; for they seem far more profane and frivolous than they used to be.

Time would fail, should we particularly consider how the new convert's former discourse is passed away: and how his idle, slanderous, profane, or perhaps polluting, words are exchanged for such as are pure, peaceable, and edifying.[1] And it is almost needless to state, that his old course of behaviour also is finally renounced. The particulars that have been mentioned may serve for a specimen: and it should be remembered that, in every respect in which "old things pass away, all things "become new," the apostle, by inserting the word "behold," hath emphatically demanded our attention to this circumstance.

This too might be illustrated by considering the various operations of the believer's mind, and the objects of his affections. He hopes and fears, grieves and rejoices, desires and hates, in a new manner; and his passions have respect to new objects. He fears the wrath and frown of God; he hopes for glory and immortality; he mourns for his own sins, and for the miseries of other men; he rejoices in God, "hungers and thirsts after "righteousness," and "abhors that which is evil."

[1] Eph. iv. 29; v. 4. Col. iv. 6. James i. 26. iii.

His judgment and taste are gradually formed upon God's word; his memory is replenished with divine truths, and his imagination employed in realizing invisible things. The company of his choice, the places of his willing resort, the books he prefers, his select topics of discourse, the use he makes of his time and talents, the manner in which he conducts business, and enjoys the comforts of life, might be enlarged upon, to shew in what respects "all things are become new." For the real Christian desires, that "whether he eats, or drinks, or "whatsoever he does, he may do all to the glory "of God."

The extent of the apostle's meaning may, however, be further illustrated, by shewing that the believer does the same things in a new manner, in respect of the *best part* of his former conduct, and *the worst* of his present.—He used perhaps to attend on religious ordinances: and, though his heart was not engaged, nor his professions sincere, he returned home well satisfied with having done his duty, or elated with an idea of his own goodness. But now, when his prayers and praises are the language of his habitual judgment and desires, and he is upon the whole a spiritual worshipper; he is continually humbled for the unallowed defects and evils of his services, and seeks to have all washed in the atoning blood of Christ.

On the other hand, it must be allowed that sin dwelleth even in the true convert; and he may possibly fall into the same evil, in which he once habitually indulged with little remorse. But in this case he is filled with anguish; he deeply abases himself before God, confesses his guilt, deprecates

deserved wrath, submits to sharp correction, craves forgiveness, and prays "to be restored to the joy of God's salvation, and upheld by his free Spirit." Even in these respects "all things are become "new."

In short, the proposition is universal; and the true believer acts in all things from new motives, by a new rule, and to accomplish far other purposes than he formerly had in view. But the more particular examination of the subject must be left to your private meditations, while we conclude at present with a brief application.

There are persons professing to be Christians, who avowedly disregard this subject; and, if we speak of regeneration or the new creature, are ready to answer, "How can these things be?" or perhaps to retort an indiscriminate charge of enthusiasm. But do you intend to answer your Judge in this manner? Do you expect to enter heaven by disproving the truth of his most solemn and repeated declarations? Is *your* judgment the standard of truth? Can nothing be needful to salvation, which *you* do not experience? If God be indeed glorious in holiness; if the society and joys of heaven be holy, and if man be unholy; an entire change must, in the very nature of things, take place, before he can possibly delight in God, or enjoy heaven, were there no other obstacle to his salvation. Let me therefore earnestly beseech you to reconsider the subject: let me prevail with you "to search the scriptures," and to beg of God to shew you the true meaning of them; and to grant that, if these things be indeed true and

needful, you may know them by your own happy experience.

Again, some religious people profess to *know* that their sins are forgiven, and others are anxious to obtain this assurance. If then it be asked, how can any man be thus certain in this matter? I answer, by a consciousness that "he is in Christ "a new creature; that old things are passed away, "and all things are become new." When our Lord forgave the sins of the paralytic, he enabled him to carry his bed: this proved his sins forgiven, both to himself and others. And, in like manner, when we know that, in consequence of having applied to Christ for salvation, we abhor all sin, love the ways of God, and delight in pious company; we have a witness in ourselves, and the testimony of God in his word, that we partake of "the gift of righteousness by faith." The clearer this evidence of our new creation appears, the fuller ground of assurance we possess: we are therefore exhorted "to give all diligence to make our "calling and election sure:" but, without this, all impressions and supposed revelations, declaring our sins to be pardoned, are manifest delusions; for they contradict the express testimony of God in his holy word.

Too many profess the gospel, who give no evidence of this gracious change, and stumble others by their unholy lives: but the text at once cuts off such men's pretensions; and the reproach ought to rest on themselves, and not on the holy doctrines which they disgrace.

But, as "the path of the just shineth more and "more unto the perfect day," I would earnestly

and affectionately caution the serious inquirer, not to undervalue feeble beginnings; but to take encouragement from them to press forward, in the diligent use of the means of grace, that the change may be rendered more evident, and that he may "abound in hope by the power of the holy "Ghost."

Let discouraged souls likewise, who feel sin to be their burden, grief, and terror, and who are ready to say to the Saviour, "Lord, to whom shall "we go? thou hast the words of eternal life:" let such fainting and feeble-minded believers learn to derive encouragement from their very fears, jealousies, sighs, groans, and tears, occasioned by "the sin that dwelleth in them," and by their being unable "to do the things that they would;" for these are, without doubt, effects and evidences of the new creation.

Finally, my brethren, if you can rejoice in the assurance that you are partakers of these inestimable benefits, shew your gratitude to God by endeavouring to communicate the same blessings to your fellow sinners: knowing that his mercy and grace are sufficient for them also; that he makes use of reconciled enemies, as instruments in reconciling others also to himself; and that he preserves such persons in life especially for this most gracious purpose.

SERMON VII.

PSALM II. 12.

Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him.

WHATEVER were the immediate occasion of this psalm, it evidently contains a most remarkable prophecy concerning Christ, and the divine vengeance to be inflicted on those who opposed the establishment of his kingdom. The Jews were the peculiar objects of the threatened indignation; and they are also the witnesses of the authenticity of those scriptures in which the prophecy is contained: for by them the Old Testament has been preserved, and they now unanimously attest that the psalm before us was written at least a thousand years before Jesus of Nazareth was born.

It may therefore be useful, in the first place, to call your attention to this remarkable prophecy of things already accomplished, or hastening to an accomplishment.—"Why do the heathen rage, "and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings "of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take "counsel together, against the Lord, and against "his anointed." Let us hear the apostle's application of this passage: "For of a truth against thy "holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both "Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the gentiles and

"the people of Israel, were gathered together, to "do *whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel deter-* "*mined before to be done.*"[1] These concluding words are well worthy of our notice, as they illustrate the plan of divine providence in the government of the world. We are apt to wonder that wicked men should be permitted to triumph as they often do: not considering that the Lord employs even rebels to fulfil his righteous purposes; and that, contrary to their own intention, they are made the executioners of his vengeance, or used as his chastening rod. Even atheists and infidels, yea, the haughtiest and most self-willed of his enemies, are permitted to prosper, till they have inflicted condign punishment on sinners, perhaps less criminal than themselves, and then they are consigned to more tremendous vengeance. Nay, the Lord even makes use of wicked men to accomplish his designs of mercy to the church. Thus the Jewish rulers and priests, with Herod, Pilate, and the people of Israel, though before at enmity with each other, combined together against the Saviour of the world: they thought evil against him and his church, "but the Lord meant it for "good."[2] And they could only do what "his "hand and his counsel had determined before to "be done."

"The kings of the earth stood up, and the "rulers took counsel together against the Lord, "and against his anointed," or his Messiah; saying, "Let us break their bands asunder, and cast "away their cords from us." All the power and

[1] Acts iv. 25.—28. [2] Gen. l. 20.

policy of man seemed to be leagued together, with a fixed determination to destroy Jesus and extirpate his doctrine. His numerous and formidable enemies unanimously resolved that "they would "not have this man to reign over them." The priests and rulers excited the people to demand his crucifixion, with unrelenting vehemence. They aimed to blot out the remembrance of him and his spiritual dominion from the earth, that they might have no authority but that of the magistrate. "We have no king but Cæsar: whosoever maketh "himself a king speaketh against Cæsar." Observe, my brethren, what was their principal objection to the religion of Jesus, and whence it arose. They hated the law and government of God; and therefore they rebelled against the kingdom and authority of his Son. Thus men still reject the gospel, because it magnifies and honours the law and justice of God, condemns all their former transgressions, and, with the proposal of a gracious pardon, implies an obligation to obedience in future; and in this respect the same part is acted over and over again, from generation to generation.

But mark what follows: "He that sitteth in the "heavens shall laugh, the Lord shall have them "in derision." He looks down with contempt and disdain upon their puny attempts to subvert his kingdom and counteract his sovereign purposes. —"Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, "and vex them in his sore displeasure." Let us see how this prophecy was fulfilled. The Jews crucified the Lord Jesus for declaring that he was

the promised Messiah, the Son of God. But, behold, he demonstrates himself to be that glorious Redeemer! He dies, indeed, but he rises from the dead, ascends into heaven, takes possession of his exalted throne, and sends forth his Spirit upon his apostles, that they may be empowered to establish his religion in the world. The Jewish rulers and people, however, having blasphemed his miracles, and condemned him to the cross, persist in their enmity, oppose his ambassadors, and persecute his harmless disciples. But what is the consequence? The gospel rapidly gains ground; persecution drives believers into remote regions, to convey the glad tidings to mankind; the dying martyrs, confirming their testimony by their harmless lives and patient sufferings, shew the excellency of their principles, and expose the odious cruelty of their adversaries. At length the day of vengeance arrives: "He that sitteth in the heavens" had poured contempt upon his impotent foes, and triumphed gloriously, notwithstanding their feeble, though determined opposition; but now "he "speaks to them in his wrath, and vexes them in "his sore displeasure." Jerusalem is surrounded by the Roman legions, the executioners of the sentence which had been pronounced; miseries till then unknown are inflicted on the devoted nation; eleven hundred thousand persons perish in the siege; the survivors are sold for slaves, till no more purchasers can be found; the city and temple are entirely destroyed, and the sacred hill of Zion given up, to be henceforth "trodden under "foot of the gentiles,"—according to another

memorable prophecy, which hath now been fulfilling for nearly one thousand eight hundred years![1] An apostate emperor[2] attempts, in defiance of Christ, to rebuild the temple and restore the Jews; but his design is frustrated by earthquakes and the signal interposition of heaven: while the Jews themselves, scattered through all nations, and almost every where oppressed, are reluctant witnesses to the truth of the scriptures, and monuments of divine vengeance on the despisers of the gospel.

The Roman emperors also exerted their extensive and absolute authority in opposing the establishment of Christianity; and it is remarkable, that several of those, who are celebrated for *virtue*, were the most determined persecutors. But what was the event? From that time this mighty empire was undermined, and at length Christianity was established, as it were, upon its ruins!

It would not be a difficult task to shew, from the history of succeeding ages, that God has fulfilled his promise, in maintaining his church against the most virulent rage of her numerous and powerful enemies; according to the next words of this prophecy, "Yet have I set my king upon my holy "hill of Zion:" and the event will be the same with all other rulers and nations who set themselves to oppose the kingdom of Christ. For a season they may prosper, boast, and blaspheme! and say, with Sennacherib, to the servants of the Lord, "Let not your God in whom you trust de- "ceive you, saying, Ye shall not be delivered into

[1] Luke xxi. 24. [2] Julian.

" my hands. Behold, ye have heard what I have " done unto all lands, and shall ye be delivered?" But God will answer them as he did the proud Assyrian, " I know thy abode, and thy going out, " and thy coming in, and thy rage against me: " because thy rage against me, and thy tumult is " come up into my ears; therefore I will put my " hook in thy nose, and my bridle in thy lips; and " I will turn thee back by the way by which thou cam- " est. The zeal of the Lord of hosts shall do this;"[1] for he hath said, and he will accomplish it, " Yet " have I set my King upon my holy hill of Zion."

But the prophecy still further expands itself: " I will declare the decree: the Lord hath said " unto me, Thou art my Son, this day have I be- " gotten thee. Ask of me, and I will give thee " the heathen for thine inheritance, and the utter- " most parts of the earth for thy possession. Thou " shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt " dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel. Be " wise now, therefore, O ye kings: be instructed, ye " judges of the earth." The counsel is addressed to kings, because monarchy was the more general kind of dominion: but all invested with authority are evidently meant, by whatever titles they may be distinguished. They are " the judges of the " earth," whose judgment is submitted to in all the secular concerns of mankind. These dignified personages are admonished to be wise, and to welcome instruction; especially in respect of the kingdom which the Lord has established under the govern-

[1] Isa. xxxvii. 10, 11, 28—38.

ment of his only begotten Son.—It therefore follows, "Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with "trembling." 'Submit to the authority of God; 'bow your sceptres to the sceptre of the Messiah: 'employ your power and influence in obeying his 'commands and promoting his glory: presume 'not, in any case, to set your authority in opposi-'tion to his; lest he dash you in pieces like a 'potter's vessel. Stand in awe of his power, reve-'rence his majesty; and, while you rejoice in your 'exalted rank, and all its alluring appendages, 'tremble also, lest they should occasion your 'deeper condemnation.'—"Kiss the Son, lest he "be angry, and ye perish from the way: when his "wrath is kindled, yea, but a little; blessed are "all they that put their trust in him."

The conclusion of the psalm is very emphatical: and the turn given to the address may imply far more than is expressed, with the trivial change in the punctuation above adopted. This is frequently the manner of the sacred writers. "How shall ye "escape if ye neglect so great salvation?" "What "is a man profited, if he gain the whole world, and "lose his own soul?"—The psalmist having said "when his wrath is kindled, yea, but a little," breaks off abruptly, as if he meant to add, 'I will 'not, I cannot describe the misery of that man 'against whom the wrath of Christ is kindled in 'the least degree: I leave the subject as too 'dreadful to be insisted on; and will rather di-'rect your thoughts to a more delightful consider-'ation; "Blessed are all they that put their trust 'in him."'

Having thus briefly reviewed this prophecy, I would again demand your attention to its contents, which are too obvious to need much interpretation, and which involve no ambiguity or uncertainty. Have not these predictions concerning the opposition of the world to the kingdom of Christ, and his triumph over his enemies, been exactly fulfilled; Have not facts corresponded with the evident meaning of the language here used?—These accomplishments of scripture, in things which no human sagacity could possibly foresee, are unequivocal demonstrations that it is the word of the omniscient God. Ingenious men may easily start plausible objections, or answer arguments with sarcasm or repartee: but is this a suitable way of treating subjects of such awful importance? Let the opposers of our holy religion stand forth with manly frankness, and fairly prove, if they can, that these prophecies were not delivered a thousand years before the coming of Christ; or else that the events have not corresponded to them. Until one of these things has been undeniably effected, we shall continue to affirm that, so far from believing without evidence, we have unspeakably better reasons to assign for our faith and hope than unbelievers can have for any of their opinions.

For my own part, after a diligent examination of the subject, during many years, I am fully convinced that the Bible is the infallible word of God; and am thankful, that I did not imbibe this sentiment from education or early prejudices, but that it has been the result of a most hesitating investigation: because this gives me a confidence, not

easily to be shaken, that the gospel will maintain its ground, though all the genius, learning, eloquence, and authority of the whole world should unite against it. Nay I am assured that it will survive the ruin of all its enemies, who can only destroy themselves: for they can neither prevent its progress and triumphs, nor hinder the salvation of the meanest believer; but will, at length, find, that "it is hard to kick against the pricks."—The remainder of the present discourse will contain a more particular consideration of the text, in the following method.

I. We will inquire into the special nature of that kingdom, which God hath determined to establish:

II. Notice the exhortation of the text; "Kiss "the Son, lest he be angry:"

III. Make some remarks on the warning and encouragement, "If his wrath be kindled, yea, but "a little; blessed are all they that put their trust "in him."

I. Then, we consider the special nature of the Messiah's kingdom. "Yet have I set my King "upon my holy hill of Zion." This was the purpose of God, even when he created the world. He formed the earth to be a theatre, on which he might display his essential glory: and the person, salvation, and kingdom of Emmanuel, constitute the grandest exhibition of all the mysteries and perfections of the divine nature that hath ever been made. All the dispensations of providence have been arranged in subserviency to the same great design; as it must be evident to all who carefully study the history of the Old Testament, or indeed the history of the world in every age.

When therefore the tempter had prevailed on our first parents to violate the Creator's prohibition, the promise of a Saviour was immediately given: "The Seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's "head:" 'the Messiah shall overturn the usurped 'dominion of the devil, and set up his kingdom on 'the ruins of it; to the final confusion and de-'struction of that great ringleader in rebellion 'against God.'—The Messiah, as the Head of this kingdom, was foretold in the law of Moses, and by the prophets, who "spake of the sufferings of "Christ and the glory that should follow."[1] This was the stone seen in vision by Nebuchadnezzar; which was "cut out of the mountain without "hands," and, having destroyed all opposition, "became a great mountain, and filled the whole "earth."[2]

In the fulness of time the promised Saviour appears; and his messenger goes before him, proclaiming as a herald, "Repent ye, for the king-"dom of heaven is at hand." Now the ancient prophecies are fulfilled: "the blind receive their "sight, the deaf hear, and the dead are raised." "Behold a voice from heaven, saying, This is my "beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear "ye him." He leads a lowly and suffering life: he goes about doing good: his most beneficent doctrine is confirmed by benign miracles of the most stupendous nature: all his words and works are stamped with divine wisdom, holiness, love, and power. Yet is he "despised and rejected of "men." He dies a spotless sacrifice upon the

[1] 1 Pet. i. 10—12. [2] Dan. ii. 31—48.

cross; numbered with malefactors, and treated with extreme contempt, malice, and cruelty. He rises from the dead a glorious conqueror; "ascends up on high, leading captivity captive, and "receiving gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious "also, that the Lord God may dwell among "them."[1] Now "he receives to himself a kingdom:" "all power in heaven and earth is given "to him:" "angels, principalities, and powers, "are made subject to him; and he is made Head "over all things to his church." His apostles, having received the promise of the Spirit from on high, go forth every where preaching the gospel, and declaring that "the same Jesus," whom the Jews had crucified, "is exalted to be a Prince "and a Saviour, to give repentance unto Israel, "and remission of sins:" "that there is no salvation in any other; for there is none other name "under heaven given unto men, whereby we must "be saved;" while the miraculous powers which they display and communicate confirm their testimony and command attention. Their formidable persecutors are confounded; thousands and tens of thousands embrace the religion of the crucified Jesus: till Jewish infidelity, and pagan idolatry, and all the power and policy with which they are supported, fall down before it; as the image in Nebuchadnezzar's vision before the stone cut out of the mountain without hands.

In this manner JEHOVAH attested the despised Jesus to be "his well-beloved Son;" thus, as it were, addressing the Jews: 'Ye have crucified the

[1] Psal. lxviii. 18.

'Lord of glory, because he said I am the Son of 'God; but behold I have raised him from the dead! 'I have exalted him at my right hand in heavenly 'places, I have set my King upon my holy hill of 'Zion, according to my ancient predictions. Now 'the whole earth shall be his inheritance, what-'ever obstacles or enemies may oppose him. I 'have undertaken and I will accomplish it: all 'men shall either bow to the sceptre of his grace, 'and become his willing subjects and redeemed 'people; or they shall be crushed as obstinate re-'bels under his feet. This is the determination 'of the Lord of Hosts.'

A mistaken idea of Christianity seems in this respect to be very prevalent. Numbers imagine that it may be very well to believe the gospel, but that there is no *necessity* for so doing; as others may be safe and happy upon their own plans. But the scripture uses a very different language: Christianity is there considered as the only true religion, and faith in Christ as the only way of being saved. This is no unessential matter, in which men may safely embrace opposite opinions: every man, who reverences the Bible as the word of God, must own that no unbeliever can escape final condemnation; for the Lord himself hath repeatedly attested it; and "he that believeth not, hath made "him a liar." Let it also be observed, that the adorable Saviour himself, the great object of our faith, is constituted our Judge: and it is never intimated, that, in the decisive hour, he will make any exception in favour of the mighty monarch, the renowned warrior, the busy politician or tradesman, the learned sceptic, or the indolent and in-

considerate trifler. "He that believeth not shall "be damned." One distinction will then swallow up all others: the faithful disciple will "sit down "with him upon his throne;" and all unbelievers will be "punished with everlasting destruction "from his presence."

The kingdom of Christ is administered by him in the character of a Mediator. As soon as sin entered into the world, the Lord made known his purpose of dealing with men, through the intervention of a peace-maker; in whose person, as Emmanuel, and through whose "obedience unto "the death of the cross," he might honourably shew mercy to the transgressors of his holy law. So that they who oppose his kingdom, not only rebel against the authority of God, but despise the riches of his everlasting mercy. To effect our reconciliation to our offended Creator, the eternal Son of God was made partaker of flesh and blood; and, having "suffered once for sins, the just for "the unjust, that he might bring us to God;" he is now ascended into the heavens, as our merciful and faithful High-priest and Advocate. "The go-"vernment is upon his shoulders," that he might be "able to save to the uttermost all those that "come to God through him." Angels, principalities, and powers obey and adore him. "He has "the keys of death and hell;" He is "King of "kings, and Lord of lords." The kingdom of nature and providence is administered by him as our brother and friend: "all judgment is com-"mitted to him: "all the fulness of the Godhead "dwells in him bodily:" he is the "Head of all

" things to his church," " the fulness of him that " filleth all in all."

How astonishing is this language! how stupendous his grace; who, from this height of personal and mediatorial dignity and pre-eminence, looks down in compassion on us sinful worms, and seems only to glory in his power as it enables him to enrich and bless our guilty souls! He reigns upon a mercy-seat, dispensing pardons and gifts to rebellious men; pardons and gifts, which he purchased for them with his own blood! He proclaims his immeasurable love in the blessed gospel; he sends his Holy Spirit to " glorify him" in our hearts, " receiving" of those things which belong to him, and " shewing them to us," in all their suitableness and inestimable value. He invites all that will to come and take of these blessings freely; he " casts out none that come;" and he confers " all " things pertaining to life and godliness" on every waiting soul. With the highest propriety, therefore, angels celebrated the Redeemer's birth in that expressive song of praise, " Glory to God in the " highest, and on earth peace, good will towards " men;" for " God sent not his Son into the world " to condemn the world; but that the world though " him might be saved." Yet, if men " refuse him " that speaketh;" if they " despise his counsel, " and will none of his reproof;" he will most certainly glorify his power in their destruction. " God hath given him a name which is above " every name; that at the name of Jesus every " knee should bow; and that every tongue should " confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of

" God the Father." This agrees with the solemn declaration quoted by the apostle, " As I live, " saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and " every tongue shall confess to God."[1]

Let it be likewise observed, that " the yoke of " Christ is easy, and his burden light." Not only are all his subjects made heirs of heaven; they have " also the promise of the life that now is;" the full assurance that no good thing shall be withholden from them, and that they shall receive a hundred-fold, even in this present time, for all the losses they sustain from love to Christ and the gospel.

II. Let us then notice the exhortation of the text: " Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and so ye " perish from the way:" that is, Submit and be reconciled to him, before the day of vengeance overtake you.

This implies, in the first place, " submission to " the righteousness of God," and a humble acceptance of mercy in his appointed way. We cannot come to a Saviour, except in the character of lost sinners. We are therefore required to humble ourselves before God, and to allow the justice of his awful sentence: and we must not at all excuse our crimes, or expect deliverance from wrath, and the gift of eternal life, as in any degree our due. " Wilt thou," says JEHOVAH, " condemn me, that " thou mayest be righteous?"[2] This was precisely the case of the ancient Jews: " They being " ignorant of God's righteousness, and going

[1] Isa. xlv. 21—25. Rom. xiv. 11. Phil. ii. 10, 11.
[2] Job. xl. 8.

" about to establish their own righteousness, have
" not submitted themselves to the righteousness
" of God. For Christ is the end of the law for
" righteousness to every one that believeth."[1]

There are two principal reasons of men's rejecting the gospel. In general they hate religion, and desire to live without restraint. They take pleasure in worldly objects: and, if not compelled by their circumstances to labour, or engaged in covetous or ambitious pursuits, they love to spend their time and money in gratifying their own humour and inclinations: but submission to Christ is absolutely contrary to such a course of life. When, however, this seems to be in a measure got over, and men take a nearer view of Christianity; they are greatly offended at its humiliating doctrines. To come before God as dependent creatures, might be endured: but to approach him as justly condemned criminals is an intolerable degradation; especially when connected with self-denial and renunciation of their darling pursuits. A method of salvation, which paid more respect to their wisdom, learning, or other distinctions, and especially to their *virtue and goodness of heart*, would meet with a better reception. To speculate and decide as philosophers, to perform duties by their native energies and good dispositions, and to demand a reward of their distinguished piety and charity, would better suit their feelings; than to be saved by grace alone, to sit as little children at the feet of Jesus, to give the Lord the glory of every good desire, thought, word, and action, to

[1] Rom. x. 3, 4.

rely on the all-sufficient merits and atoning blood of the Saviour, and to receive eternal life as the gift of God in him. Yet the general tenor of scripture requires this unreserved submission of sinners to divine justice, and reliance on free mercy and grace, as essential to salvation.

But the language under consideration likewise demands implicit obedience to the Saviour, as the anointed King over his redeemed people, and over all worlds for their advantage. "Kiss the Son lest "he be angry, and so ye perish from the way." When Samuel anointed Saul king over Israel, he testified his cheerful and cordial acquiescence in the Lord's appointment, by the kiss of allegiance. In like manner, we are not only required to welcome the salvation of Christ with unfeigned gratitude, and to express our love by obedience in some particulars, according to our own choice or discretion: but we are called upon to submit to his authority, and yield obedience in all things; and, if our repentance, faith, and love be sincere, we shall cordially render it. Our past sins will appear to us as acts of rebellion against our Sovereign and bounteous Creator; present failures will be considered as additional provocations, which need forgiveness through the atoning blood; and our obedience, as the only undeniable evidence of our repentance and conversion. We shall regard every interest or object which would draw us aside, as an idol and usurper; every contrary propensity as the remains of our old bondage; and the path of duty as true liberty, the perfection of which we shall long after with groans and tears.

But further, we are required, to "honour the

"Son, even as we honour the Father that sent "him."[1] Thus the worshippers of Baal *kissed* his image, and the idolatrous votaries of the golden calves used the same ceremony."[2] JEHOVAH therefore seems to say in the words of the text, 'I demand for my beloved Son that very adoration, which I prohibited and abhorred, when offered unto idols.' When our Lord had said, "I and "my Father are One," the Jews accused him of making himself equal with God; and their renewed attempt to stone him, together with the immediate cause of his condemnation to the cross, proves that he neither denied nor evaded the charge. On this point, he and the Jews were at issue; for this supposed crime he suffered and died; but "he was declared to be the Son of God "with power, by his resurrection from the dead." And he, who carefully examines the account given of the worship rendered to "the Lamb that was "slain," by redeemed sinners, an innumerable multitude of angels and all creatures, as made known in vision to the apostle John, will not be able to mark any difference between it, and the adoration paid to "Him who sitteth on the throne, "and liveth for ever and ever."[3] It cannot therefore be wonderful, if the disciples of Christ on earth should be required to learn the worship of heaven, as a part of their "meetness for the inhe-"ritance of the saints in light."—But we proceed,

III. To make some remarks, on the warning and encouragement, "If his wrath be kindled,

[1] John v. 23. [2] 1 Kings xix. 18. Hos. xiii. 2.
[3] Rev. v. 6—13.

"yea, but a little; blessed are all they that put "their trust in him."

What is this but a declaration that, if you refuse the salvation of Christ, reject his authority, and deny him the honour due to him, his love will be turned into fiery indignation, and he will glorify his name in taking vengeance on his despisers, as well as in saving and blessing his humble disciples?—With allusion to the day of judgment it is said, "The kings of the earth, and the great "men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, "and the mighty men, and every bondman, and "every freeman, hid themselves in the dens and "in the rocks of the mountains; and said to the "mountains and rocks fall on us, and hide us from "the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and "from the wrath of the Lamb: for the great day "of his wrath is come, and who shall be able to "stand?"[1] Observe the words, "*the wrath of the* "*Lamb*," the wrath, not only of an offended King and Judge, but also of a despised Saviour. This will enhance the guilt and condemnation of those who neglect the gospel, and render their condemnation more intolerable than that of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Our attention should be peculiarly fixed on the expression, "If his wrath be kindled, *yea, but a* "*little*,"—that is, Should you be found among the more plausible and moderate of those, who refuse submission to the Saviour; among those who have least provoked his indignation; your doom will yet be very tremendous. This comes home to the

[1] Rev. vi. 15—17.

case of multitudes. Many persons readily express their abhorrence of the blasphemies, atheism, and other enormous crimes, which, alas! have been perpetrated in a neighbouring nation; and with a latent self-flattery they rise in their own good opinion, by comparing their conduct with that of such daring enemies to God and his Christ. Others exclaim against those that deny our Lord's divinity or his atonement; and they seem to feel much inward satisfaction in opposing these dangerous heresies: while some congratulate themselves that they never scoff at religion, but always speak respectfully of its sacred truths and duties. Thus in various ways men keep up a persuasion that they are Christians: yet, if we insist upon unreserved submission to Christ, according to that view of it which has been stated, they would perhaps acknowledge they had not gone *so far* in religion. If they have not been avowed opponents, they have in great measure endeavoured to maintain a neutrality: but such persons should recollect that Christ has said, "He that is not with me is against "me;" so that all will be considered enemies, who are not his cordial friends and loyal subjects. —Indeed this is a general cause of men's destruction: they compare themselves with some other characters, fancy themselves better than they, quiet their consciences, and go on in the ways of sin and ungodliness.

But what consolation will it be in the day of wrath, should your condemnation be one degree less heavy than that of your neighbours? Should you approach as near to Christianity as a man can possibly do who is not a true disciple of Christ,

what would it avail you? Suppose you hesitate, from love to some lawful earthly comfort, which you prefer to Christ, and refuse to part with for his sake: will not that very circumstance render your feelings most exquisitely poignant, when the doom shall be pronounced against you? This cannot be too closely brought home to conscience: for it was a prevailing delusion even at the time when our Lord was on earth. Know therefore, whether thou art a Judas, betraying Christ for sordid lucre, under the mask of a disciple or a minister; a Pilate, "washing thine hands," by giving up his cause from fear of man and then pretending to excuse thy conduct; a Herod, that openly insultest him; a Gallio, that carest for none of these things; or a Felix, who tremblest and stiflest thy convictions: whether thou join the multitude that cry, "Crucify him, crucify him; "not this man, but Barabbas;" or, with Agrippa, art "almost persuaded to be a Christian;" or "de- "partest sorrowful, because thou hast great pos- "sessions:" whichsoever of these characters may belong to thee, know assuredly that thou wilt "perish from the right way," unless thou repent, and become a believing and obedient subject of the Lord Jesus. And what will it avail thee that numbers will be associated in the same condemnation, or even perish in a still more tremendous manner?

But is not this harsh and uncharitable? Hear the words of Christ himself. "Except a man "deny himself, and take up his cross and follow "me, he cannot be my disciple." "Except he "forsake all that he hath, he cannot be my disci-

" ple." " Does charity consist in contradicting " the true and faithful witness," yea, the all-merciful Saviour, or " in speaking peace, when there " is no peace?" The case is the same as it was of old. Some daringly blaspheme and openly reject the Son of God: others use respectful language, but their actions shew that they value the pleasures of sin, the friendship of the world, the pride of life, filthy lucre, or the praise of men more than him and his salvation. But all such persons virtually declare, that they who, actuated by various worldly motives, concurred in nailing him to the cross, did right. None, who lived at that time, and might have heard his doctrine or witnessed his miracles, were wholly free from the guilt of his death, except the remnant of his true disciples: and none at present are wholly free from the charge of " crucifying the Son of God " afresh," who persist in neglecting his great salvation.

" Blessed then are all they that put their trust " in him." They are blessed in their present security and privileges; and they shall be blessed in their eternal inheritance. To you my brethren, who thus cordially welcome the Saviour, and submit to the King of Zion, with unreserved obedience and fidelity, though with many lamented imperfections; to you belong " peace with God," peace of conscience, " the adoption of children," and the consolations of the Holy Spirit. It is your privilege to " rejoice in hope; to be patient in " tribulations;" to find support in trials, safety in all dangers, victory over every enemy, and a rich advantage from all losses and sufferings. Whether

you be rich and prosperous, or poor and afflicted; whatever be your station or circumstances, you are blessed; for God himself hath pronounced you so: you shall be blessed through life, and in death, and when the Redeemer shall appear to judge the world. "Lift up then your heads, for your re-"demption draweth nigh:" and, when others shall cry to the rocks "to fall on them, and hide them "from the wrath of the Lamb;" you shall exclaim with triumphant exultation, "This is our God, "we have waited for him, and he will save us; "this is the Lord;—we will be glad and rejoice "in his salvation."

SERMON VIII.

1 CORINTHIANS IV. 5.

Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts; and then shall every man have praise of God.

THE manner in which the zealous, unwearied, and disinterested labours of the apostle Paul were requited by mankind, forms the most conclusive proof of human depravity; next to that arising from the contradiction, contempt, and cruelty, which his divine master had experienced. Not only was this distinguished servant of God "every "where spoken against;" and treated as "the "filth of the world, and the offscouring of all "things," by unconverted Jews and gentiles: the whole body of Jewish converts also was exceedingly prejudiced against him; many of the churches which he had planted were alienated from him; and his Corinthian converts had been so perverted by false teachers, as to entertain the most injurious suspicions as to the motives of his ministerial conduct. But fervent zeal for the honour of Christ, and affectionate longing after the salvation of souls, kept him from fainting, and rendered him "stead-"fast, immovable, always abounding in the work "of the Lord:" and he even submitted, with the-

most evident reluctance, to vindicate his character, and magnify his ministry, to the disaffected Corinthians; that, by re-establishing his apostolical authority, he might recover them from the delusions into which they had been seduced. In attempting this, he warned them against exalting some and despising others, of those who had laboured among them. "Let a man," says he, "so "account of us as of the ministers of Christ, and "stewards of the mysteries of God." All Christians are servants of Christ, and the word rendered *ministers* denotes those servants who wait on any person, as ready at all times to execute his orders with unreserved assiduity.—But ministers are also "stewards of the *mysteries* of God:" they are not mere teachers of morality, but they are entrusted with the great mysteries of revealed truth, that they may declare them to mankind as they have received them of the Lord. "Moreover, it is re-"quired in stewards that a man be found faithful." It is not necessary for ministers to be orators, courtiers, philosophers, or even men of distinguished genius or learning; but integrity and faithfulness are indispensable. Any person of common prudence would prefer a down-right honest steward, though but moderately qualified, to the most accomplished man in the world, who, he was aware, would oppress his tenants and embezzle his property. Thus faithfulness is the grand requisite in a minister; without which, talents, however they may recommend him to the applause of men, will not procure him deliverance from the wrath of God. "But," says the apostle, "with "me it is a very small thing that I should be

"judged of you, or of man's judgment; yea, I "judge not mine own self: for I know nothing "by myself, yet am I not hereby justified; but he "that judgeth me is the Lord."—It must not be expected, that every one who aims to be faithful should thus decidedly rise superior to the opinion of men, especially of those within the pale of the church. At the call of duty, a minister may be enabled to venture giving offence; yet, he may do it reluctantly and be drawn into many reserves, under the notion of prudence, which may greatly impede his usefulness. Christians should therefore take heed that they do not inadvertantly tempt ministers to unfaithfulness, or render faithfulness uneasy to them.—The apostle no doubt did examine his own motives and conduct; but he knew that an appeal lay from his decision to that of his heart-searching Judge; and that reflection gave rise to the caution and warning of the text; "Therefore judge nothing before the time, until "the Lord come, who both will bring to light the "hidden things of darkness, and will make mani- "fest the counsels of the hearts, and then shall "every man have praise of God." Let us

I. Meditate on the coming of the Lord, and the solemnities of that awful event:

II. Consider the discoveries which will then be made:

III. Advert to the consequences of those discoveries.

I. Let us contemplate the coming of the Lord, and the solemnities of that awful event.

The sacred scriptures continually lead our thoughts to this great crisis, when the important

and eternal interests of the whole human species will be finally determined. The servants of God from the beginning of the world looked forward to it: even "Enoch the seventh from Adam prophe-"sied of these things; saying, Behold the Lord "cometh with ten thousands of his saints, to exe-"cute judgment upon all, and to convince all that "are ungodly among them, of all their ungodly "deeds which they have committed, and of all "the hard speeches which ungodly sinners have "spoken against him."[1] That profession which Job ardently wished might be "graven with an "iron pen and lead in the rock for ever," seems to have had as much respect to the second coming of the Lord, as to his first appearance in our nature; "I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he "shall stand at the latter day upon the earth; and, "though after my skin worms destroy this body, "yet in my flesh shall I see God; whom I shall "see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and "not another; though my reins be consumed "within me."[2]

In the fiftieth psalm, which is a most poetical as well as a prophetical description of a future judgment, we have this sublime language: "Our God "shall come, and shall not keep silence, a fire shall "devour before him, and it shall be very tempest-"uous round about him. He shall call to the "heavens from above, and to the earth that he may "judge his people. And the heavens shall declare "his righteousness, for God is judge himself. "Selah."[3]—The words of Solomon shall close these

[1] Jude 14, 15. [2] Job xix. 23—27. [3] Psalm l. 3—6.

citations from the Old Testament. "Rejoice, O "young man in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer "thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the "way of thine heart, and in the sight of thine "eyes: but know thou, that for all these things "God will call thee into judgment." "For God "shall bring every work into judgment, with "every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether "it be evil."[1]

In the New Testament the same subject continually demands our attention. Christians are said "to wait for the Lord from heaven, even Jesus "which delivered us from the wrath to come;" to "look for the glorious appearing of the great God "and our Saviour Jesus Christ;" and "to love "his appearing." Thus the language of the Old Testament relative to the coming of JEHOVAH, and our preparing to meet God, who is "judge "himself," is applied to Christ by his apostles, without the least hesitation. And with a conscious dignity he spake of himself, in his lowest abasement, as the Judge of the world, and the arbiter of men's eternal state: "When the Son of man shall come "in his glory, and all his holy angels with him, "then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory, "and before him shall be gathered all nations."[2]

"The coming of the Lord" signifies, therefore, the appearance of Christ in human nature to judge the world; when he shall exercise omnipotence, omniscience, and every divine perfection; and so "come in his own glory," as Mediator, "and in "the glory of the Father," as sovereign Lord of

[1] Eccles. xi. 9. xii. 14. [2] Matt. xxv. 31, 32.

all. This revelation of Jesus Christ will be visible to the whole world. "This same Jesus, which is "taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in "like manner, as ye have seen him go into heaven." "Behold, he cometh with clouds, and every eye "shall see him, and they that have pierced him; "and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because "of him: even so, Amen."[1] The man Jesus, in his glorified body, even that body which was crowned with thorns, scourged, spitted on, and nailed to the cross, will then be made visible to all men: to those who thus abused him, and to such as have in every age consented to this deed, by despising him, and his salvation. He will be seen by all "who have crucified him," as it were, again and again; as well as by them, for whom "he "once suffered, the just for the unjust, to bring "them unto God."

But how immensely will his appearance, as Judge of the world, differ from that of "the man of sor-"rows!" The mount of transfiguration, when "his countenance shone as the sun, and his raiment "was like lightning;" yea, the vision of his glory, which caused his beloved disciple, who had once reclined on his bosom in the familiarity of endeared friendship, to "fall down at his feet as dead;" can give us but a faint idea of that divine light and majesty, with which he will be arrayed when he shall ascend his awful tribunal. "He shall then "be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels:" the angels of his power and authority; the ministers of his vengeance and his love.—"At the end

[1] Acts i. 11. Rev. i. 7.

" of the world, the Son of man shall send forth his " angels; and they shall gather out of his king- " dom all things that offend, and them that do ini- " quity; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire: " there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." " They shall see the Son of man coming in the " clouds of heaven with power and great glory; " and he shall send his angels, and they shall ga- ther together his elect."[1]—Hence it is evident that all the angels are the creatures and servants, as well as the worshippers,[2] of the incarnate Son of God.

His coming will be announced by a summons, august and tremendous beyond description; and immediately followed by the resurrection of the dead. " The Lord himself shall descend from " heaven with a shout, with the voice of the arch- " angel and the trump of God: and the dead in " Christ shall rise first." " Behold I shew you a " mystery! We shall not all sleep, but we shall " all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling " of an eye, at the last trump. For the trumpet " shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incor- " ruptible, and we shall be changed." " The " hour cometh, when all that are in the graves " shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they " that have done good to the resurrection of life, " and they that have done evil to the resurrection " of damnation."[3] Believers will rise first, and then such of the saints as shall be alive on the earth, at that time will be " changed;" that " death

[1] Matt. xiii. 41—43. xxiv. 30, 31. [2] Heb. i. 6.

[3] 1 Thess. iv. 16. 1 Cor. xv. 51, 52. John v. 28, 29.

"may be swallowed up in victory." Afterwards the multitudes of the wicked will "awake to shame "and everlasting contempt." The bodies of the unnumbered millions, who through succeeding ages have inhabited the globe, wherever laid, or however consumed, will be restored to life, and reunited to their immortal souls, that they may participate their happiness or misery. "Then the dead, small "and great, shall stand before God. The sea shall "give up the dead that were in it; and death and "hell shall deliver up the dead which were in "them."[1]

At this important crisis, the earth and all its works, yea the visible heavens also, shall become one general conflagration: "The heavens and "earth, which now are, by the same word are "kept in store, reserved unto fire, against the day "of judgment and perdition of ungodly men." "The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the "night, in which the heavens shall pass away with "a great noise, and the elements shall melt with "fervent heat; the earth also, and all the works "which are therein shall be burned up."[2] Yea, "heaven and earth shall flee away, and there shall "be found no place for them."

In vain should we attempt a description of this sublime and awful scene: our faculties labour, and our tongues as it were falter, when we would think or speak of such subjects. What then will be the feelings of the immense multitudes assembled on this occasion! What the astonishment, terror, and despair of the impenitent! of such as have idol-

[1] Rev. xx. 13—15. [2] 2 Pet. iii. 7, 10—12.

ized those things which are the prey of all-devouring flames! of those who have blasphemed that Saviour who appears to be their judge! or ridiculed the divine testimony concerning the place of torment, and those evil spirits which are ready to seize upon them! Let us then recollect, that *we* shall be present, not as mere spectators, but as cited "to give account to him that is ready to "judge the quick and the dead." "For we must "all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, "that every one may receive the things done in "his body, according to that he hath done, whe-"ther it be good or bad."[1] Our present conduct is voluntary; we choose whether we will serve the Lord, or not: but we shall not be allowed to choose whether we will stand before his tribunal, or decline the awful decision.

It is extremely frivolous to start objections against the doctrines of revelation, taken from our low apprehensions, or levelled against the misinterpretations of injudicious believers. "Ye do "err, not knowing the scriptures nor the power "of God." He has declared these things in his authenticated word: "his testimony is sure and "giveth wisdom unto the simple:" and "he that "believeth not hath made him a liar."

Will any man presume to say, that it is impossible for God to raise the dead? That human nature should be capable of such daring absurdity ought to cover us with shame, and cause us to tremble. Let us, my friends, imitate the ancient patriarch, who "by faith, being warned of God of-

[1] 2 Cor. v. 10.

" things not seen as yet, was moved with fear and " prepared an ark." Let us " prepare to meet our " God, and seriously inquire, Who may abide the " day of his coming? or who may stand when he " appeareth?"

Neither ought we to regard those " scoffers," who, according to the prediction of the apostle, are " come in these last days, walking after their own " lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his " coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all " things continue as they were from the begin- " ning of the creation." We know not indeed the precise time when the Lord shall come; but we should not be ignorant that " one day is with the " Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years " as one day:" and we are assured that " the day " of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night; " for, when they shall say, Peace and safety, then " sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail " upon a woman with child, and they shall not " escape."[1] Death is very near, and judgment follows. In this sense " The judge standeth at " the door:" and " the end of all things is at " hand." " Be ye therefore ready; for ye know " not what hour your Lord doth come." The intervening space will soon elapse: let us then " account his long suffering to be salvation:" and, " seeing we look for such things, let us be diligent, " that we may be found of him in peace without " spot and blameless."—We proceed,

II. To consider the discoveries which will then be made. " The Lord shall come, who will both

[1] 1 Thess. v. 2, 3.

" bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and " will make manifest the counsels of the hearts."

" When the Son of man shall come in his glory " and all his holy angels with him, then shall he " sit upon the throne of his glory; and before him " shall be gathered all nations: and he shall sepa- " rate them one from another as the shepherd di- " videth the sheep from the goats;" that is, with perfect ease, and infallible certainty. Then shall he be seated on "the great white throne," the emblem of his awful justice and spotless purity, " and " the books shall be opened." This expression, referring to the affairs of men, leads our thoughts to the discoveries of that solemn season. *The book of the divine law* shall be opened, as the perfect standard of good and evil; *the book of providence*, stating the talents committed to the stewardship of each individual, with the advantages or disadvantages of his situation; *the book of omniscience*, developing all the particulars of every man's conduct, and all the motives and thoughts of his heart; and the *book of conscience* or memory, answering to every charge or discovery, however before buried in oblivion. But " *another book*" shall also be opened, or no flesh could be saved; even *the book of life*, in which all the elect of God, all true believers, are registered, with the evidences of their repentance, faith, and love. Then, all " men " will be judged out of those things, which are " written in the books, according to their works. " And whosoever shall not be found written in the " book of life, shall be cast into the lake of fire."[1]

[1] Rev. xx. 12—15.

We know but little of the real characters even of those with whom we are most intimately acquainted; and far less of other men's. A vast proportion of their outward conduct is concealed from us: what strangers then must we be to the dispositions and counsels of their hearts! Perhaps a tenth part of the actions of our nearest relatives or friends does not come under our notice: we must therefore judge, as well as we can; and, though caution be necessary, a measure of suspicion adequate to our uncertainty would mar all our earthly enjoyments. David seems not to have suspected Ahithophel, nor the apostles Judas: yet they were both plausible hypocrites. Many of you, my friends, may perhaps be conscious, that, if your neighbours or relations knew certain things in your conduct, which you carefully and successfully conceal, your characters would be injured, and yourselves covered with confusion. "But, "when the Lord shall come, he will bring to light "all these hidden things of darkness." Then the dishonesty and extortion which have here escaped detection, and even suspicion; or which have been pleaded for with specious fallacy, will appear in all their full deformity before men and angels. The oppression, rapine, and cruelty, which have been gilded over with the splendour of great talents and renowned achievements, will be viewed in another light, when "the earth shall disclose her "blood, and no more cover her slain." Nor will that degrading licentiousness and sensuality, which are often covertly practised by persons of decent or respectable character, any longer be concealed;

though it is now a shame "to speak of those things "which are done of them in secret."

But, to relieve our minds from such painful reflections, let us take a view of the contrast. The Lord will also bring to light the good works of his believing people: "he saw them in secret, and he "will reward them openly." Those fruits of faith and love, which the world perhaps vilified and called by some opprobrious name; and those, in which the left hand was scarcely suffered "to "know what the right hand did;" will then be disclosed and approved by the righteous judge. The self-denial of his despised disciples, in sparing from every article of expense and indulgence, to raise a little fund for the relief of the needy, and even of their calumniators and persecutors; their secret prayers and compassionate tears over the very persons who counted them harsh and uncharitable, because they would not speak "peace when "there was no peace;"[1] their scrupulous care to avoid every degree of injustice, when no blame was likely to be cast upon them for it; their earnestness in secret devotion, with deep humiliation and enlarged benevolence: all these will be discovered when the Lord shall come, and will greatly tend to illustrate and distinguish the characters of men. The blemishes and misconduct of pious persons are too often visible to their neighbours, and give occasion to their scoffs and impiety: but it will then appear that these things were lamented before God with many groans and tears; that they

[1] Jer. viii. 11.

condemned themselves more severely than others could condemn them: that they prayed without ceasing not to be left to repeat their sin and folly; and that they vigilantly used every means of crucifying their evil propensities, and bridling their appetites and passions.

The discoveries of that solemn day will likewise relate to men's words. "Every idle word that "men shall speak shall be given an account of at "the day of judgment: for by thy words thou "shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt "be condemned."[1] Our words must indeed be known in some measure to others: but men are commonly very careful to whom they declare their unreserved sentiments; and would often be extremely disconcerted, if their discourse in private circles, among the select companions of their vices, should be disclosed to those with whom they desire to maintain another kind of character. But the profane, blasphemous, atheistical, infidel, and abominable speeches, which men vent in their secret cabals; with all the falsehoods, slanders, boastings, bitterness, imprecations, and horrid language, which on some occasions they utter, during the whole course of their lives, will be produced against them before the assembled world. "For "the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity; it is an "unruly evil, full of deadly poison; it sets on fire "the whole course of nature, and is set on fire of "hell."[2] The secret influence of evil conversation corrupts men's principles and morals, and wounds their reputations: it ruins domestic and relative

[1] Matt. xii. 36, 37. [2] Jam. iii, 6—10.

comfort, and disseminates impiety, infidelity, heresy, profligacy, enmity, discord, and confusion, through neighbourhoods, cities, and nations. Yet no discovery can be made of such private mischiefs, except by the omnipresent and omniscient judge. It would be tedious to insist particularly on the flatteries, deceptions, false colourings, seductions, and other artifices, by which wicked men carry on their base designs. These, however, are "hid-" den things of darkness," which will be brought to light when the Lord shall come. If then all our words, without exception, whether spoken openly, or among our select companions, shall be thus made known at the great decisive day; could nothing else be produced against us, we must surely feel that this alone would overwhelm us with confusion.—The story is well known, of the person, who invited a company of his friends, that were accustomed to take the Lord's name in vain; and contrived to have all their discourse taken down and read to them. Now if *they* could not endure to hear the words repeated, which they had spoken during a few hours; how shall we bear to have *all* that we have uttered, through a long course of years, brought forth as evidence against us at the tribunal of God? But the hour is coming when this will actually be the case: when not a single irreverent mention of the Creator's sacred name; not one objection to his law, government, or gospel; not one sarcasm or jest upon his cause or worshippers; shall be overlooked! when every word "spoken in the ear in closets shall be pro-" claimed on the house tops!" Where then will the wicked and ungodly appear? How shall any

of us endure that scrutiny: unless we have fled for refuge to the hope of the gospel, and all our sins have been buried in the depths of the sea?

But words of another kind shall be made known when the Lord shall come. The servants of God love to associate together, and many censure them for it: but what saith the scripture? "They that "feared the Lord spake often one to another; "and the Lord hearkened and heard it: and a "book of remembrance was written before him "for them that feared the Lord, and thought "upon his name; and they shall be mine, saith "the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up "my jewels; and I will spare them as a man "spareth his own son that serveth him. Then "shall ye return, and discern between the righ-"teous and the wicked; between him that serveth "God, and him that serveth him not."[1] When the "books shall be opened," the social piety, gratitude, and charity of true Christians will be brought to light. Their discourse about the perfections, ways, and works of God; the best methods of promoting his glory, the peace of the church, and the benefit of mankind; their mutual warnings, exhortations, counsels, and encouragements; their spiritual, affectionate, and animating conversation; and all the words which the Lord delighted to hear, will be made known before men and angels. And, when these shall be contrasted with the filthy, impious, and frivolous speeches of the wicked, it may easily be conceived, how men's real characters will be discri-

[1] Mal. iii. 16—18.

minated, and in what sense, "by their words they "will be justified or condemned."

The thoughts also of every heart shall be disclosed. Men generally imagine, that these at least are free and subject to no control; so that they allow their memory and imagination to excite and feed corrupt affections: representing to themselves, with all the ingenuity of invention, scenes that accord to their predominant propensities: and by these speculative indulgences they try to make themselves amends for the restrictions, which regard to reputation, interest, or health may impose. But God especially requires purity of heart, and "truth in the inward parts," by which real religion is distinguished from hypocrisy. "Ye fools," says our Lord, to some of these "whited sepulchres," "did not he that made "that which is without make that which is within "also? Thou blind Pharisee, first cleanse that "which is within the cup and platter, that the out-"side may be clean also."[1] How would it astonish us, if we could see all that passes in the thoughts of many very *virtuous* persons, during a single day! and, as to the imaginations of the profligate, they are the very residence of evil spirits, in which they forge all manner of abominable crimes, previously to the actual commission of them. Instead therefore of men's hearts being better than their lives, as self-flattery often suggests, they are uniformly far worse: for every sinful word and action was at first an evil thought and desire; but ten thousand evil thoughts and desires,

[1] Matt. xxiii. 25—28. Luke xi. 39, 40.

conceived and cherished in the heart, proceed no further; because men have not opportunity, courage, or ability to realize them in practice.

Every man, however, must judge for himself in this matter: but let us ask ourselves, whether we should feel comfortable, at the idea of *all* our secret thoughts being disclosed, I do not say to the whole world, but to our intimate friends and acquaintance? Yet they must all be disclosed to men and angels, at the great day of righteous retribution! "Let then the wicked forsake his "way, and the unrighteous man his *thoughts*:" for, unless evil thoughts are excluded or opposed, every apparent reformation must be hypocritical. "O Jerusalem, wash thy heart from wickedness, "how long shall vain thoughts lodge within "thee?"[1] Peter seems even to intimate a doubt whether the thought of Simon Magus's heart did not constitute the unpardonable sin: "Pray God, "if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be "forgiven thee."[2] This is therefore a matter of the greatest importance: and the discovery of those secret thoughts which no human eye could reach, and which were scarcely ever suspected, will exceedingly help to discriminate characters at the great day. Nay, the countless multitude of vile imaginations and desires, which are the spontaneous production of our depraved nature, will greatly illustrate the truth and justice of God, in all his declarations and decisions concerning the workers of iniquity.

On the other hand, the thoughts of believers

[1] Jer. iv. 14. [2] Acts viii. 20—24.

also will be made known, when the Lord shall come. Then it will appear that they abhorred, and laboured to exclude, every evil imagination, and to repress all sinful desires; that they humbly mourned over the vain-glorious, envious, impatient, and peevish emotions of their hearts; and that they endeavoured to employ their minds, during their retired hours, in holy contemplations. It will then be known how much their thoughts were occupied in considering by what means they might best glorify God, and serve their generation; and what desires they felt, and what plans they formed, which they could not accomplish. Their affectionate longings after the salvation of their relatives, neighbours, and persecutors; and the anguish of heart which they felt on their account, even when censured as severe and harsh in reproving and warning them, will be brought to light; with all other pious, holy, and benevolent thoughts and desires: and these discoveries will evidence them to have been the genuine followers of the holy Jesus.

We must even go farther still in this matter: the state of every man's heart, and the motives of his actions will then be fully disclosed. The admired morality of numbers will then be demonstrated to have been only a modification of self-love; without any real regard to the authority or glory of God. The Pharisee's prayers, fasting, and almsgiving will be shewn to have resulted solely from pride and ostentation. Many will be proved to have preached the gospel "from envy and "strife," from avarice or ambition; and to have professed it, as a step to emolument or distinction.

In short every mask will then be taken off; many admired characters will appear completely odious and contemptible; and "the things which have "been highly esteemed among men" will appear to have been "abomination in the sight of God." Need I say, how tremendous this must be to dissemblers of every description, who now act a plausible part, and exhibit on the stage of the world in an assumed character?

But, on the other hand, the humility, gratitude, zealous love, and holy affections of true believers will be made manifest to the universe. The pure motives of those actions, which were censured or calumniated, will be demonstrated; every accusation will be silenced, and all misapprehensions removed; and it will be undeniably evident that, from the time when they made an explicit profession of the gospel, their repentance, faith, love and habitual conduct were answerable to that profession.—We proceed therefore,

III. To advert to the consequences of these discoveries.

By them the immense difference of character, between the righteous and the wicked, will be undeniably manifested. In this world, numbers find it convenient to varnish over their crimes, to palliate or excuse many parts of their conduct, and to cast other parts, as it were, into the back ground, where they are little observed: while regardless of their hearts, they have leisure to place their counterfeit virtues in a conspicuous light, and to make them appear immensely better than they really are. On the contrary, the believer has many infirmities; and is engaged in a sharp con-

flict with "the sin that dwelleth in him," and with the temptations of Satan. The world rigorously scrutinizes his conduct; and the Lord tries his faith and grace, "as silver is tried" in the furnace. He is so afraid of hypocrisy and ostentation, that he carefully conceals many things which might exalt his character, and scrupulously shuns the appearance of good before men, when he but suspects that there is not the reality of it in the sight of God.[1] On these and other accounts, the apparent difference betwixt true Christians and specious hypocrites or moralists, bears no manner of proportion to the degree in which their characters do really differ. But the discoveries of the great day will perfectly distinguish them, and all the world will "discern between the righteous and the "wicked, between him that serveth God and him "that serveth him not."

When the Lord shall thus "bring to light the "hidden things of darkness," every mouth will be "stopped, and all the world will become guilty "before God; for by the works of the law shall "no flesh be justified in the sight of God."[2] The discoveries of the great decisive day will completely elucidate this fundamental doctrine of Christianity, which is now so generally misunderstood or opposed: for the whole of men's thoughts, words and works will appear so contrary to the holy precepts of God, or so far short of their spiritual perfection; that all must then feel the force of David's words, "If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquity, O Lord, who shall stand?" As therefore "all have

[1] 2 Cor. xii. 6. [2] Rom. iii. 19, 20.

"sinned and come short of the glory of God," all must fall under condemnation who are not interested in the salvation of the gospel. But it may be asked, in what sense then will every man be judged "according to his works?" This shall be reserved for the subject of a separate discourse: and it may suffice to answer at present, that all avowed unbelievers, however distinguished, will be judged and condemned for the sins they have committed; and all professed believers will be judged according to their works, as proving, or disproving, the sincerity of their profession.

The discoveries of this awful day will likewise silence all the blasphemies, which are continually uttered against the justice of God in the condemnation of the wicked. It is on this account called "the day of wrath and revelation of the "righteous judgment of God." While men conceal or palliate by far the greatest and worst part of their conduct, they may argue plausibly against the denunciations of scripture: but, when the whole of their character and conduct shall be openly exhibited, and all the world shall know every thing respecting them which is now seen by the heart-searching Judge alone; then the justice of the tremendous sentence will be universally acknowledged; the friends of God will perceive and adore his glory in this part of his moral government; and "the wicked shall be silent in darkness" and despair, when compelled to "depart accursed into "everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his "angels."

Far be it from us to suppose that the merciful Saviour, who is TRUTH itself would use such

language, if not really applicable to the case! He does not allow us to speak deceitfully for him; and will he utter fallacious words himself? Yet we cannot hear of "eternal punishment," "unquenchable fire," "outer darkness," "weeping "and gnashing of teeth," "a worm that never "dieth" and the place "prepared for the devil and "his angels," without feeling our hearts tremble, and revolt against the description. How unspeakably dreadful then will be the accomplishment! when the Lord, to stop the sinner's mouth, by a discovery of his crimes, shall say, with stern indignation, "These things hast thou done, and I kept "silence: thou thoughtest that I was altogether "such an one as thyself, but I will reprove thee and "set them in order before thine eyes!—Now con"sider this, ye that forget God, lest I tear you in "pieces, and there be none to deliver."[1] Cease then, poor sinner, to object and dispute; and make haste to flee from the wrath to come, and to seek refuge in the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ.

A more pleasing subject, however, is before us, while we contemplate the redeemed of the Lord, saved by his grace, washed from their sins in the Saviour's atoning blood, completely justified, absolved from every charge, and "presented faultless "before the presence of his glory with exceeding "joy." Then "death shall be swallowed up in "victory;" and raptures inexpressible will commence a felicity, still to be increased, with the enlargement of their capacities, through the countless ages of eternity.—But I must leave it to your

[1] Psal. l. 21, 22.

own minds, brethren, to form some conception of the opposite sensations which will delight or agonize every heart, when the wicked "shall go away "into everlasting punishment, and the righteous "into life eternal."

"And then shall every man have praise of God." Then every humble believer, according to his measure of faith and grace, will be honoured with the commendation of his condescending Lord, for those services which the world condemned, and which perhaps his brethren undervalued or censured. To be accosted by the Judge of the world, in these most gracious terms, "Well done, good "and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of "thy Lord," will form an adequate gratification to the noblest ambition of which the rational nature is capable. Seeking for this "glory, honour, and "immortality," let us here be indifferent to all human applauses or contemptuous reproaches. This is "the honour that cometh from God only," and is reserved for "all his saints;" when no more danger shall remain of their being "exalted above "measure," or sacrilegiously ascribing any thing to themselves: but when, on the contrary, "they "will cast their crowns before the throne," and return all to the bounteous giver, in endless songs of adoring praise. Let us not faint then, on account of our trials and difficulties; "for our light "afflictions which are but for a moment are work-"ing for us, a far more exceeding and eternal "weight of glory."

Let us also remember the caution, "Judge

"nothing before the time." Our duty often r
quires us to form some judgment of men's chara
ters and actions: but in all other respects ou
business is with ourselves and the Lord, and n
with our fellow servants. And the more diligen
we are, "to be found of him in peace, witho
"spot and blameless;" the less time and thoug
we shall have to spare, for censuring and co
demning the conduct, or suspecting the motive
of other men.

But do you, my friends, really believe the
things? and are you preparing to meet your Judge
I fear, the actions, conversation, and spirit
numbers awfully prove the contrary. Still, hov
ever, the Lord waits to be gracious: flee then
him as a Saviour, without longer delay, who wi
speedily come to be your Judge.—You who pr
fess the gospel, be advised and persuaded to "e
"amine yourselves whether ye be in the faith
look well to it that your evidences of conversio
are clear and decisive; for that day, of which w
speak, will detect multitudes of self-deceivers,
well as unmask many artful hypocrites. And,
you are conscious of following the Lord with a
upright heart, take heed that you do not slacke
your diligence, or yield to unwatchfulness: "L
"your loins be girded and your lights burnin
"and ye yourselves like unto men that wait f
"their Lord:" for blessed are those servants who
"the Lord when he cometh shall find watching
"verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himsel
"and make them to sit down to meat, and will com

" forth and serve them."[1] "Therefore, my be-
" loved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmovable, al-
" ways abounding in the work of the Lord; for-
" asmuch as ye know that your labour is not in
" vain in the Lord."

[1] Luke xii. 35—38.

SERMON IX.

ROMANS II. 6—9.

Who will render to every man according to his deeds: to them who, by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, and honour, and immortality, eternal life: but unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath; tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil.

In meditating on the solemnities, discoveries, and consequences of that great decisive day, when the Lord shall come to be our Judge; we were obliged to pass over, in a general manner, several important particulars relative to the subject, and especially we reserved, for a separate discourse, the consideration of the manner in which all men will be "judged according to their works," and "receive according to what they have done, "whether it be good or evil." The present will therefore be an appendix to the preceding discourse, as intended to illustrate its interesting truths, and to render them more perspicuous and impressive. In the passage before us, the apostle does not undertake to decide a controverted point of doctrine, to state the method of a sinner's justification, or to account for that difference of character which actually subsists among the descendants of fallen

Adam. These subjects he has fully discussed in other parts of his writings: but here he takes occasion from his subject to shew, that the opposite conduct of the righteous and the wicked will terminate in future happiness or misery. He considers some persons as being more favoured by providence than others, as the Jews had every way the advantage of the gentiles: but he intimates that they generally abused those advantages to their deeper condemnation. "Despisest thou the "riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and "long-suffering, not knowing that the goodness "of God leadeth thee to repentance?" The more kind, patient, and merciful the Lord is, the baser our rebellion and ingratitude must appear, the greater cause have we to repent, and the more abundant motives and encouragements. But if men presume on his lenity, supposing that he will not or cannot punish, and so encourage themselves in sin, they "despise the riches of his "goodness and mercy;" and, "after their hard-"ness and impenitent heart, treasure up to them-"selves wrath, against the day of wrath and "revelation of the righteous judgment of God, "who will render to every man according to his "deeds." The treasures which they perhaps covetously and dishonestly accumulate on earth, must be left to their survivors: but the vast accessions which they daily make to their load of guilt, and the heavy wrath of God against them, are laid up for *themselves*, to be their future and eternal portion. For, at the great day of righteous retribution, God "will render unto every man ac-"cording to his deeds: to them who by patient

" continuance in well-doing seek for glory, and " honour, and immortality, eternal life; but unto " them that are contentious, and do not obey the " truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and " wrath; tribulation and anguish upon every soul " of man that doeth evil."—In discoursing on these words, I shall,

I. Describe more fully the two characters contrasted by the apostle, and shew the doom reserved for each:

II. Compare the statement thus made with several other important scriptures, which may serve to elucidate and confirm it:

III. Explain more precisely the rule of judgment, as delivered in the sacred oracles: and

IV. Make some particular application of the subject.

I. I shall endeavour to describe more fully the two characters contrasted by the apostle, and to shew the doom reserved for each.

The apostle's reasoning, throughout this whole epistle, proves that he was speaking of sinners under a dispensation of mercy. He therefore considers a man, thus circumstanced, proposing to himself the acquisition of " glory, and honour, " and immortality." Such a purpose must imply a belief of the scriptural doctrine concerning the perfections and government of God, the immortality of the soul, and a future state of righteous retribution; with a persuasion that eternal happiness is attainable even by sinners, in the way which the Lord hath revealed. At the same time the man is convinced that the blessing must be sought with diligence and self-denial, and that it ought to

be preferred before all other objects whatever. Thus, while "there be many that say, Who will "shew us any good?" "seeking every man his "gain from his quarter," pursuing worldly pleasures, honours, and distinctions, or wasting their lives in sloth and dissipation; he "seeks first the "kingdom of God and his righteousness," and "labours for the meat which endureth unto ever-"lasting life." He is now become a candidate for immortality; and nothing, inferior to an endless inheritance and unfading joys, can satisfy the vast desires of his heart. Whatever he renounces, ventures, or suffers, he resolves to seek "a king-"dom that cannot be moved." He feels the force of our Lord's questions, "What is a man profited, "if he gain the whole world, and lose his own "soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for "his soul?" He does not, however, merely seek deliverance from wrath and misery; he is also athirst for happiness in the enjoyment of God, and of those "pleasures which are at his right hand "for evermore." He attends to religion, not that he may be seen of men, or acquire reputation; nor is he solely intent on pacifying an uneasy conscience: but as a reasonable creature, formed for an immortal existence, he aims, in this introductory scene, to ensure felicity in the world to come. He "believes that God is, and that he is a re-"warder of them that diligently seek him;" and therefore he seeks his favour, as "the one thing "needful," and endeavours to render all other objects and pursuits subservient to this grand concern.

It is evident that men of this stamp are very

scarce; and that most of those, who are called Christians, are wholly strangers to this habitual purpose and conduct. The few, who answer the description, are not confined to any single sect, but are scattered about in the visible church, as "men wondered at" for their singularity and preciseness. Now, at whatever period of life any man is thus brought "to seek glory, and honour, "and immortality," he enters on a new state, and constitutes a new character: "being made free "from sin, he becomes the servant of God, has "his fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting "life."

These persons seek the desired good "by patient "continuance in well doing." A sinner cannot be said "to do well," until he humbles himself before God for his transgressions, mourns for them in true repentance, confesses them with self-abhorrence and a sincere purpose of forsaking them, and seeks mercy in the way which God hath appointed, for the glory of his own name and the honour of his violated law. A rebel can do nothing well so long as he vindicates and persists in his rebellion, refuses mercy because the terms of it are too humiliating, and is wholly averse to submission and renewed allegiance. The prodigal son, when he "came to himself," and determined to return home and humbly crave his father's forgiveness, began "to do well." The proud morality, formal devotion, or ostentatious liberality of an impenitent sinner will never meet the approbation of that God, who sent his Son into the world, "not to call the righteous but sinners to "repentance." Humble penitents, and they alone,

begin to answer to the character described by the apostle.

All such persons will likewise credit the testimony of God concerning his Son, and the way of acceptance through his atonement and mediation. Whatever modern reasoners may plausibly advance concerning the 'innocence of error,' and the small importance of doctrinal truth: the inspired writers uniformly consider unbelief as springing from an evil heart; and false doctrines, as "damnable heresies," and "strong delusions," which God permits for the punishment of those who hate the truth, because they love sin. "How "can ye believe, who receive honour one of ano-"ther?" "This is the condemnation, that light "is come into the world, and men love darkness "rather than light, *because their deeds are evil.*" "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting "life; but he that believeth not the Son shall not "see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him."[1] This is a fair specimen of the scriptural declarations on this subject; and, as Christ "is the way, the "truth, and the life, and no man cometh to the "Father but by him;" we may assuredly infer that no one "does well," according to the apostle's meaning, who believes not in the Son of God, but refuses to seek eternal life as the gift of God in him.

The Lord hath instituted in his holy word certain ordinances, as means of grace to our souls, and that in them we may render him the glory due unto his name. The characters of whom we speak will certainly honour the Lord and seek his

[1] John iii. 16—21, 36.

blessing, by a diligent and conscientious observance of these ordinances. They will also separate from bad company, avoid temptations and occasions of sin, exercise self-denial, and renounce all pleasures or interests, which interfere with the exercise of divine love and the "obedience of faith;" and they will prove the sincerity of their religious profession, by observing the directions, and copying the example of the Lord Jesus, and by walking in newness of life.

Numbers, like the stony ground-hearers, shew much earnestness in these things, and express great confidence and joy; yet they are "partial" in obedience, and "continue but for a time." They readily perform such duties as are creditable, cheap, and easy; but they refuse to part with Herodias, or to cut off the offending right hand; they do not mortify constitutional or customary evils, reject unhallowed gain, venture the displeasure of rich and powerful friends, or attend to those things in religion, which would expose them to contempt, reproach, and hardship. Thus they maintain a religious profession while exempted from peculiar trials; and many pass through life unsuspected by themselves or others: but, "if persecution or tri-"bulation arise because of the word, by and by" persons of this character "are offended."—On the contrary, they, of whom we now speak, have "re-"ceived the good seed into an honest and good "heart, and bring forth fruit with patience." They are not partial in their religion, but shew themselves the friends of Christ by doing whatsoever he commands them. They have indeed many infirmities, and may fall into sin through inadver-

tency; they may even live in some sinful neglect or practice, through ignorance or mistake; but they cannot habitually commit known sin. They search out their faults; and, as they discover any, repent of and forsake them. "Their hearts are "sound in the Lord's statutes, and they shall "never be ashamed."

In this course of believing obedience, the disciples of Christ encounter many temptations, struggle with various discouragements, and are exposed to sharp trials. The contempt and hatred of the world, the assaults of the tempter, the peculiarities of their circumstances, dispositions, and habits, and the chastisements of their heavenly Father, combine to try their patience. Perseverance and constancy, in following the dictates of conscience, expose them to the charge of obstinacy and perverseness, or subject them to heavy losses and difficulties; while inward conflicts, permitted to humble and prove them, sometimes make them ready to faint and despond. Yet they "patiently "continue in well-doing;" they submit to the will of God under afflictions, meekly bear injuries, wait the appointed time for the fulfilment of the Lord's promises, and persevere in the path of upright obedience. They seek for blessings which cannot be expected in any other way: and are ready to say, "Lord to whom shall we go? thou "hast the words of eternal life." Their religion resembles a river, which still continues to flow, though sometimes with a fuller current, and at others with a diminished stream: while that of the hypocrite resembles a land-flood, now impetuously deluging the fields, and then wholly dis-

appearing. But to those who thus "patiently "continue in well-doing," and to them only, will the righteous Judge at last assign the eternal inheritance. "He that continueth to the end shall "be saved."

We need not enlarge on the reverse of this character. "Unto them that are contentious, and do "not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness; "indignation and wrath; tribulation and anguish "upon every soul of man that doeth evil." Such persons, instead of believing the gospel, and in humble repentance embracing the promised salvation, "contend" against it, "contradicting and "blaspheming." They dispute against the strictness of the divine law or justice, and the sentence denounced against transgressors. They oppose their own reasonings against the express testimony of God, in respect of the mysteries of redemption; and venture to "charge him foolishly," as if they were more wise and righteous than He. Being thus "contentious," "they do not obey the truth;" they will not submit to God, repent of sin, believe in Christ, separate from the world, or "walk in "newness of life." For "they obey unrighteous-"ness:" sin, in one form or other, has dominion over them; and their unbelief is the effect of a depraved heart and a rebellious will, which it tends reciprocally to confirm and render more desperate. To all these the righteous Judge will recompense "indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish;" not regarding their outward privileges or distinctions, but deciding impartially according to their works: for, "there is no respect of persons with "God."—Let us then,

II. Compare this statement with several other important scriptures, which may serve to elucidate and confirm it.

It is the uniform declaration of the sacred writers, that all men shall be "judged according to "their works:" yet it is equally evident that faith, or unbelief, determines a man's state in the sight of God, as justified, or as under condemnation. "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; "but he that believeth not shall be damned." "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that heareth "my word, and believeth on him that sent me, "hath everlasting life, and shall not come into "condemnation, but is passed from death unto "life." "He that believeth not is condemned "already, because he hath not believed in the "name of the only begotten Son of God."[1] The same instruction is implied in the vision of St. John. "The books were opened: and another "book was opened, which is the book of life; and "the dead were judged out of those things, which "were written in the books according to their "works; and whosoever was not found written in "the book of life was cast into the lake of fire."[2]

The prophet Ezekiel, having shewn that "the "ways of the Lord are equal," was led to state the characters of the righteous and the wicked; and then he adds, "When the wicked man turneth "away from his wickedness, and doeth that which "is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive:— "Repent and turn from all your transgressions, so

[1] Mark xvi. 16. John iii. 18; v. 24.
[2] Rev. xx. 12—15.

"iniquity shall not be your ruin."[1] The true penitent therefore will not be condemned when "judged according to his deeds;" though he must be so if the solemn process should be conducted according to the strictness of the law, without reference to the grace of the gospel, to which all these invitations and promises belong.

The atoning sacrifices of the Mosaic law, which typified the redemption of Christ, were offered upon mount Zion: and David, inquiring who should ascend and worship with acceptance on that holy hill, draws a character which entirely accords with that given of a true believer in the New Testament."[2] Thus he shews us, *which of the professors of true religion* will stand accepted in the day of judgment: but this has nothing to do with such as openly neglect or oppose revealed truth, or refuse the salvation of the gospel.

In perfect harmony with these scriptures, our Lord describes his true disciples: "Whosoever "shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, "the same is my brother, my sister, and my mo-"ther." "Blessed are they that hear the word of "God and keep it."[3] This word or will of God doubtless has peculiar relation to Christ, and to the voice from heaven, "This is my beloved Son, "in whom I am well pleased, hear ye him:" and a moral or pharisaical decency of conduct most essentially differs from "the obedience of faith." "He that believeth not God hath made him a liar, "because he believeth not the record that God

[1] Ezek. xviii. 27—30. [2] Psal. xv.
[3] Matt. xii. 49, 50. Luke xi. 28.

"gave of his Son. And this is the record, that "God hath given to us eternal life, and this life "is in his Son; he that hath the Son hath life, "and he that hath not the Son of God hath not "life."[1] The unbeliever, therefore, whatever his moral character may be, so far from "doing the "will of God," disobeys his express command, and deliberately affronts his veracity.

Our Lord closed his sermon on the mount with this remarkable passage. "Not every one that "saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the "kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will "of my Father which is in heaven. Many will "say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not "prophesied in thy name? and in thy name cast "out devils? and in thy name done many won-"derful works? and then will I profess unto them, "I never knew you, depart from me ye that work "iniquity. Therefore, whosoever heareth these "sayings of mine and doeth them, I will liken "him unto a wise man, which built his house upon "a rock; and the rain descended, and the floods "came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that "house, and it fell not; for it was founded upon "a rock. And every one that heareth these say-"ings of mine and doeth them not shall be liken-"ed unto a foolish man, which built his house "upon the sand; and the rains descended, and "the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat "upon that house, and it fell, and great was the "fall of it."[2] This passage evidently refers to the

[1] 1 John v. 10—12.

[2] Matt. vii. 21—27. Luke vi. 46—49.

day of judgment; but it mentions none except those who "call Christ Lord," come to him, and "hear his sayings." His professed disciples therefore are exclusively intended; and living faith is described as distinguishable from dead faith by its holy fruits. Disobedient professors of Christianity will be condemned as "hypocrites," or "wicked and slothful servants;" and avowed unbelievers as "enemies who would not have the "Son of God to reign over them."[1]

But the solemn description of the great decisive day, given us by the judge himself, is most conclusive on the subject.[2] In this important scripture, acts of kindness, shewn to believers for the sake of Christ, are the only deeds mentioned, as the reason for the rejoicing words addressed to the righteous, "Come, ye blessed of my Father in-"herit the kingdom prepared for you from the "beginning of the world." And no charge is brought against the wicked, but their omission of such duties, when the sentence is denounced, "Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared "for the devil and his angels." Yet it will then appear, that the righteous have performed many other good works of divers kinds, and that the wicked have been guilty of numerous other crimes and omissions. Why then did our Lord mention these things exclusively? Doubtless, because he supposed them to constitute the most conclusive evidence of genuine faith, or of unbelief. Beneficence, not springing from love to Christ, nor

[1] Matt. xxv. 30. Luke xix. 21—27.
[2] Matt. xxv. 31—46.

exercised towards his disciples, his "brethren" or representatives, cannot be here intended, as many have inconsiderately imagined, for who will say that an indiscriminate liberality, connected with an ungodly licentious life, will entitle a man to the heavenly inheritance? Or, if any should venture on such an assertion, would *they* also allow that the want of this beneficence will expose a man to the awful doom here denounced, however free from vice, or adorned with other virtues, his character may have been? Or will any one maintain, that the liberality of infidels to one another, from whatever motive, answers to our Lord's words, "I was hungry and ye gave *me* meat:—"for as much as ye did it to the least of these *my* "*brethren*, ye did it unto *me*?"—Indeed a measure of the same absurdities attaches to every other interpretation of this passage; except that which goes upon the following principles, gathered from the several parts of the sacred volume. There is no salvation for sinners, except by the mercy of God through Jesus Christ; no interest in this salvation without faith; no true faith, except that which "worketh by love;" no love to Christ is genuine which is not accompanied by special love to his disciples; and no love to the brethren is "unfeigned," which does not influence a man to alleviate their distresses, supply their wants, and do them good, as he hath opportunity and ability. This love is "the fruit of the Spirit:" where the Spirit of Christ dwells, all the fruits of the Spirit will be produced: and "if any man have not the "spirit of Christ he is none of his." A detail of particulars would not have suited the majesty of

our Lord's description: the most prominent distinguishing feature of believers and unbelievers was selected; and thus an intimation was given of the rule of judgment, sufficiently clear to the humble student of scripture, though others may mistake or pervert it. In this view of it the whole is obvious, and coincides with other testimonies of the sacred writers. "We know that we have "passed from death unto life, because *we love the* "*brethren.*"[1] "Seeing ye have purified your "hearts through the Spirit, unto unfeigned *love* "*of the brethren,* see that ye love one another "with a pure heart fervently; being born again— "by the word of God."[2] "If a brother or sister "be naked, or destitute of daily food, and one of "you say, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and "filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those "things which are needful for the body, what doth "it profit?" "My little children, let us not love "in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in "truth: and hereby we know that we are of the "truth, and shall assure our heart before him."[3] So that love of the brethren, shewn in active kindness, is uniformly required as evidence of our faith in Christ and love to his name.

These reflections elucidate the following scriptures also, and are confirmed by them. "Know, "O vain man, that faith without works is dead." "The grace of God that bringeth salvation—teach- "eth us, that, denying ungodliness and worldly "lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and

[1] 1 John iii. 14. [2] 1 Pet. i. 22, 23.
[3] James ii. 15, 16. 1 John iii. 18, 19.

"godly in this present world; looking for that "blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the "great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ; who "gave himself for us, that he might redeem us "from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a "peculiar people, zealous of good works."[1]

One most solemn and affecting passage still remains to be considered: "The Lord Jesus shall "be revealed from heaven in flaming fire, taking "vengeance on them that know not God, and "that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus "Christ; who shall be punished with everlasting "destruction, from the presence of the Lord, and "from the glory of his power, when he shall come "to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in "all them that believe."[2] We are here expressly informed, that at the day of judgment all will be condemned, who have not *known God*, and *obeyed the gospel:* but how many persons of moral character and external respectability will be found in that company! No exceptions, however, are intimated: the saints, even those that believe, will alone stand accepted by the Judge: and all else will be "punished with everlasting destruction "from his presence."

I shall conclude this part of the subject with the words which Christ spake to his servant John: "Behold I come quickly, and my reward is with "me, to give every man according as his work "shall be. I am Alpha and Omega, the begin-"ning and the end, the first and the last. Blessed "are they that do his commandments, that they

[1] Tit. ii. 11—14. [2] 2 Thess. i. 5—12.

"may have right to the tree of life, and may "enter in though the gates into the city."[1] But to whom does the title and privilege of the tree of life belong? Surely to the true believer, who loves Christ, and keeps his commandments. "Ye "are my friends," says he, "if ye do whatsoever I "command you."

This view of the subject harmonizes the whole scripture, and reconciles those parts which seem to be contrary to each other: but, when this centre of union is overlooked, men either "go about "to establish their own righteousness," or run into antinomianism. These two extremes are the *Scylla* and *Charibdis*, the fatal rock or dreadful whirlpool, of our perilous voyage. I have therefore endeavoured to mark out the safe passage between them; and may the Holy Spirit guide us at a distance from these, and all other dangers, on the right hand and on the left!—We proceed then,

III. To state more explicitly, and shew more precisely, the rules of judgment, as delivered in the sacred oracles.

It is most evident, that the scripture was intended principally for those who bestow pains to understand it: and this obvious reflection illustrates the propriety of the descriptions there given of the great decisive day; for they certainly relate almost exclusively to those who profess the religion of the Bible. We cannot therefore infer any thing from these descriptions concerning those who have not been favoured with revelation, or have rejected it: though other scriptures give some

[1] Rev. xxii. 12—14.

light on the subject. The holy law is the unalterable rule of right and wrong, in respect of all men however distinguished: nor is it possible, that God should judge of characters and actions by any other rule; for the law is the exact reflection of his infinite holiness, and he "cannot deny him-"self." He can, however, pardon the guilty, and make allowance for unavoidable disadvantages. "They who know not the will of God and do it "not shall be beaten with few stripes: but they "who know and refuse to do his will shall be "beaten with many stripes."[1] It will be "more "tolerable in the day of judgment for Sodom and "Gomorrah," than for those who heard the doctrines and saw the miracles of Christ, and did not repent and believe the gospel.

The apostle therefore adds a few verses after the text, "As many as have sinned without law "shall also perish without law." They have indeed violated the perfect rule of duty: but, as they had not the advantage of the written word, they will not be liable to so heavy a condemnation, as wicked Jews and Christians: yet, as they acted against the dictates of their own reason and conscience, those remains of the law originally "written in the heart," they "will perish without "law." For, "being a law to themselves," their consciences may indeed excuse some parts of their conduct, but they must condemn others; especially "in the day when God shall judge the secrets of "men by Jesus Christ:" so that "every mouth "will be stopped, and all the world become guilty

[1] Luke xii. 47, 48.

"before God."[1] All, except idiots, (who scarcely can be thought accountable creatures,) know far better than they practise, and might know much more, were not their hearts set against the truth through love of sin. All men must therefore be condemned according to this rule; and the number, and aggravation of their crimes, compared with the measure of their advantages, is the standard by which their punishment will be ascertained, by the infinitely righteous Judge.

What the Lord may do *in mercy* to any of his sinful creatures, it does not become us to inquire beyond what he hath seen good to reveal: but we have no ground to suppose that any who die without spiritual religion can be happy in another world: and neither scripture nor history countenance the opinion, that the Lord gives his sanctifying Spirit where he has not sent some measure of the light of revelation. We are sure however, that the state of the pagans will be far better than that of wicked Christians, so called. While we therefore rejoice in our privileges, we may tremble lest they should increase our condemnation: and the state of the nations, who still sit in darkness "and the shadow of death," should animate our endeavours, and excite our prayers for their conversion.

The apostle adds, "as many as have sinned under the law, shall be judged by the law." The Jews rejected the gospel, and sought justification by the works of the law." Deists discard revelation, and rely on their own moral conduct to recommend

[1] Rom. iii. 19.

them to God; and various descriptions of professed Christians form a complex law of works, out of the religion of the New Testament. But, whatever system men favoured with revelation may adopt, if they put the event of the great decisive day on their own works, as the ground of their confidence; they will be judged according to the holy law of God, and fall under its awful curse. "Christ is become of none effect to them: they "are fallen from grace, and become debtors to do "the whole law."[1] The advantages which such men enjoy, the crimes which they commit, their proud aversion to the humbling salvation of the gospel, and the degree of their enmity and opposition to the truth, will determine the measure of their guilt and punishment, according to the decision of unerring wisdom and infinite justice.

Some observations have already been made on the case of those who allow the doctrines of Christianity, renounce dependence on their own works, and profess to expect pardon, righteousness, and eternal life, "as the gift of God through Jesus "Christ our Lord." Such persons, when the Lord shall come, will be judged according to this profession; and, if their faith be shewn to have been living and genuine, by its holy fruits, according to the discoveries which have been mentioned, they will, as justified believers, receive the reward of righteousness; and their future glory and felicity will be proportioned to the degree of their grace and obedience of faith. But, if their conduct and dispositions have proved that they were not true

[1] Gal. v. 1—6.

believers, they will remain under the condemnation of the law, aggravated by their abuse of the gospel; and so have "their portion with hypocrites" and unbelievers.

IV. Let us then make some particular application of the subject.

It has been before remarked, that "we *must* all "appear before the judgment seat of Christ;" and let this reflection sink deep into every heart. Men voluntarily break the laws of their country, but dire compulsion takes place when they are convicted and executed for their crimes. The young man, rejoicing in his vigour and flow of spirits, may give a loose to his passions; but let him remember that "for all these things God will bring him into judgment." You may now forget God; but he will not forget you, or any of your works. You may affront his justice, and despise his mercy; but he will shortly say, "It is a people of no under-"standing; therefore he that made them will not "have mercy on them."[1] Now is the day of the Lord's patience: but the day of wrath and perdition of ungodly men approaches: now he invites you to draw near to his throne of grace; shortly he will summon you to his awful tribunal. "Seek "ye the Lord while he may be found; call ye upon "him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake "his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; "and let him return unto the Lord, and he will "have mercy on him, and to our God for he will "abundantly pardon." "Strive to enter in at the "strait gate, for many shall seek to enter in, and

[1] Isa. xxvii. 11.

" shall not be able. When once the master of the " house is risen up, and hath shut to the door;" it will be for ever in vain for those that stand without, to cry, " Lord, Lord, open to us." Now the Saviour pleads with you in accents of tenderest love; " How long ye simple ones will ye love sim- " plicity, and scorners delight in their scorning, " and fools hate knowledge? Turn ye at my re- " proof, I will pour out my Spirit unto you, I will " make known my words unto you." But ere long he will frown on the impenitent and unbelieving, and say, " Because I called and ye refused, I " stretched out my hands and no man regarded; " —therefore shall ye eat the fruit of your own " ways, " and be filled with your own devices." " Oh that men were wise, that they understood " these things, that they would consider their latter " end!"[1]

But will any of you, with this solemn season of discovery and decision before your eyes, deliberately put the event of it upon the goodness of your hearts and lives? Is there not in your very soul an involuntary shrinking from so strict and awful a scrutiny? Do you not feel a disposition to say, " Enter not into judgment with thy servant, O " Lord?" " If thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquity, " O Lord, who may stand?" As you value your immortal souls, do not now insist on any plea, which you feel to be inadmissible in the great day of righteous retribution. Stand not on any distinction between your case and that of your fellow sinners. Seek above all things an interest in the

[1] Prov. i. 19—31. Deut. xxxii. 29.

atonement and righteousness of Christ; and "count "all but loss, that you may win him, and be found "in him." Disregard the scorn and reproach of "an unbelieving world; anticipating that day when every eye shall see the despised Redeemer, and his favour be universally allowed to be of more value than ten thousand worlds.—"Let every one," however, "that nameth the name of Christ depart "from iniquity." "If we say that we have faith, "and have not works, will faith save us," in the day "when the Lord shall render unto every man "according to his deeds?" Alas! a dead faith, a presumptuous hope, and an unsound profession, will only increase the anguish and shame of final condemnation.

Even if we be true believers, negligence and loose walking will cloud our evidence, and weaken our warranted confidence: while the greatest possible encouragement is given to all genuine good works, by that very system which excludes boasting, and allows none of our services the least share in our justification before God. "Not a cup of cold "water given to a disciple, from love to Christ, "shall lose its reward." He will accept every kindness to those whom we look upon as his brethren, even as if we had done it to him in person: and while we forgive injuries, love enemies, deny ourselves, endure hardships, or bear any cross, from love to his name, and desire to adorn and recommend his gospel; he notices our poor services, and will applaud and reward them before men and angels. Nay, if he observe, that we form plans and make attempts to promote his cause and be serviceable to his people; even though he see

good to disappoint our endeavours; he will kindly accept the zealous intention, and openly say, "Thou didst well that it was in thine heart."[1] "Let us not therefore be weary in well-doing, for "in due season we shall reap, if we faint not." And "may we all find mercy of the Lord in that "day of retribution," and have an abundant entrance into his kingdom of everlasting glory and felicity!

[1] 1 Kings viii. 18.

SERMON X.

1 TIMOTHY VI. 6.

Godliness with contentment is great gain.

The desire of gain, in one form or another, is universal: for, though no one can seek "the true "riches" for himself without disinterested love to God and his neighbour, yet love to himself and thirst after happiness cannot be extinguished; being essential to our nature as God originally constituted it, and not superinduced by the entrance of sin. If, however, the apostle's compendious maxim were generally believed, how many vain projects would be superseded! what fatigues, dangers, anxieties, envies, contentions, frauds, oppressions, wars, murders, and mischiefs might be prevented!

The context is worthy of our peculiar attention. The servants in those days were generally slaves; and it frequently happened that Christians were the property of pagans, Such a condition is commonly thought very wretched, and slaves have seldom escaped cruel usage: yet the apostle elsewhere says, "Art thou called being a servant? care "not for it." The Christian slave is "Christ's "freed man;" for, "if the Son make you free, "then are ye free indeed:" but the ungodly master is in deplorable bondage; "for he that committeth "sin, is the servant of sin."

In this view of the subject the apostle here says, "Let as many servants as are under the yoke "count their own masters worthy of all honour; "that the name of God and his doctrine be not "blasphemed." For, if Christian servants behaved less respectfully to their masters than others did, the heathen would blame their religion, as teaching them to violate the duties of their station. "And they," says he, "that have believing mas- "ters, let them not despise them because they are "brethren; but rather do them service, because "they are faithful and beloved, partakers of the "benefit." No doubt the involuntary servitude of those, who have not by atrocious crimes forfeited their liberty, is inconsistent with the moral law of God; and, if *real* Christianity should become universal, slavery must be finally abolished. But the apostles were not legislators or civil magistrates: as ministers of religion, they taught men how to act in their several situations, *as matters then stood:* and, when the rulers embraced the gospel, it was proper that they too should be taught their duty, and instructed to apply a legal and regular remedy to the evil. But it would have exceedingly increased the opposition made to the gospel, if the preachers of it had attempted, by their own influence, to subvert the existing system in this respect; or had even required Christian masters indiscriminately to liberate their slaves. Whereas, if they were taught to use them as brethren, the ends of humanity would be effectually answered, as to the individuals concerned, and the example would have the most salutary tendency.

Having stated this matter, the apostle next shewed the sources and consequences of the contrary doctrine; exhorted Timothy to withdraw from vain disputers, who "supposed that gain was "godliness;" and then subjoined the words of the text, "but godliness with contentment is great "gain;" for, says he, "we brought nothing into "this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing "out. And, having food and raiment, let us be "therewith content."

In considering the subject we may,

I. Notice the connexion between godliness and contentment:

II. Shew in what respects godliness with contentment is great gain:

III. Deduce some practical instructions.

I. We notice the connexion between godliness and contentment, as it is evidently implied in the text.

The word *godliness* frequently occurs in the writings of the apostles, and must therefore be understood according to the tenour of their doctrine. We must not consider it merely as a proper regulation of our affections and conduct towards God, according to the first table of the moral law; but as implying especially the dispositions and demeanour suited to a sinner under a dispensation of mercy, and invited to reconciliation with his offended God through the mediator of the new covenant.

When this has been duly attended to it will evidently appear, that deep humility and unfeigned repentance constitute an essential part of evangelical godliness; for, unless we habitually possess

this frame of mind, we cannot sincerely make those confessions and supplications, or present those sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving, which are peculiar to Christianity. Now every reflecting man must perceive, that deep humility, accompanied with cheering hope, exceedingly tends to produce contentment. A vast proportion of the impatience and fretfulness of mankind results from a false estimate of their own merits and consequence. This induces them to consider their trials great, their comforts few and trivial, the least affront intolerable, and every kind and degree of respect inadequate, except unqualified adulation and submission. But such views of Jehovah and the adoring seraphim, as filled Isaiah with self-abasement; or such apprehensions of the divine majesty, as caused Job to "abhor himself, "and repent in dust and ashes;" would give them very different views in these respects. Did they enter into the feelings of the apostle, when he called himself the "chief of sinners," and "less than "the least of all saints;" were they ready to own with the centurion, "Lord, I am not worthy that "thou shouldest come under my roof;" or with John Baptist, "I am not worthy to loose his shoe-"latchet;" a total revolution would take place in all their sentiments and sensations about outward comforts and trials, and the usage they meet with from those around them. The sharpest affliction would then appear light and momentary, compared with their deserts; the meanest provision would be received with lively gratitude; while with the patriarch they confessed, "we are not "worthy of the least of all thy mercies:" the most

unfavourable situation or disagreeable employment would be considered as better than they have a right to expect: and under the greatest injuries or affronts they would submit to the justice of God, who may correct or punish by whatever instruments he pleases.

Humble thoughts of themselves reconcile men to obscure stations, mean circumstances, and common occupations, as most suited to them: and, when they are evidently called to more public services, they enter on them with reluctance and diffidence; except as lively faith renders them superior to their fears, and a sense of duty engages them to proceed. Such men are ready to stoop, and "in honour to prefer others;" they do not complain of being buried in situations, where they are undervalued or neglected. They "think so-" "berly of themselves, and as they ought to think;" and this secures them from manifold disappointments and vexations, to which other men are exposed. That, it has been said, 'will break a proud 'man's *heart*, which will scarcely break a humble 'man's sleep:' and it is certain that many of the troubles of life affect our peace almost in exact proportion to the degree of our pride or humility. The common opinion, therefore, that self-abasement produces melancholy, and that a favourable opinion of ourselves tends to cheerfulness, is an egregious mistake. The former may indeed depress the spirits, when connected with misapprehension, ignorance, and unbelief; and the latter may produce a flow of agreeable sensations, when nothing occurs to ruffle the mind. Such a state, however, is so seldom to be expected in this chang-

ing world, and amidst the mortifications to which self-sufficiency exposes men; that the cheerfulness depending on it must be extremely precarious: while patience, meekness, hope in God, and humble gratitude evidently conduce to an uniform composure and serenity; the direct contrast to disappointed pride and ambition, rankling resentment, sickening envy, and rebellious murmurs.

Even godly sorrow for sin, when accompanied with a humble hope of mercy, produces a tender pleasure, a melting sweetness, a serious joy, a heart-felt satisfaction; which far exceed the utmost refinements of sinful indulgence. Repentance itself, which men postpone under the notion that it is the bane of comfort, is the source of the purest and most permanent rejoicing; and the true Christian must consider those seasons, in which, melted into contrition for his sins, he sowed the seed of his future harvest with penitent tears, as but little removed from the happiest hours of his life.

Faith likewise, which in its varied exercises constitutes a most important part of evangelical godliness, is intimately connected with contentment. As "the evidence of things not seen," it sets before us the holy heart-searching God, and causes us to speak and act as in his immediate presence. This powerfully tends to calm our tumultuous passions, to awe our souls into adoring submission, and to encourage confidence and humble expectation. Faith descries an invisible world, and places us on the verge of eternity, as about to launch into that boundless ocean. With this prospect before us, the concerns of time shrink into insignificancy: and all that disparity of rank

or fortune, which subsists among dying men, and about which their contests, cares, and discontents are principally excited, appear like a fleeting dream, a pageant passing over the stage. Our trials also are perceived to be transient and unimportant: we feel it to be a weakness and folly greatly to disquiet ourselves about such trifles; and discover that our wisdom consists in being careful to discharge our duty, while on our pilgrimage. So that, if "we looked more to the "things which are not seen," and less to "the "things which are seen," we should certainly become more satisfied with our lot, and less anxious about our temporal provision.

Faith beholds especially the unseen Saviour; and, crediting the sure testimony of God, contemplates him in all the scenes of his life and death. And, whether we look to the stable and manger at Bethlehem; to the cottage and carpenter's shop at Nazareth; or to the well in Samaria, where Jesus wearied with his journey sat down at noon and craved a draught of water: whether we follow him to the desert, where he was "a hungered" while tempted by the devil; to the field, where with up-lifted hands and eyes he gave thanks for the barley bread and small fishes; or to the meals which he and his disciples may be supposed to have made on the broken fragments of that humble feast: or whether we meditate on his general poverty, who "had not where to lay his head;" his scanty maintenance, at one time earned with the sweat of his brow, at another received as the alms of his followers; every object may teach us, "in whatever state we are therewith to be content."

If we turn our thoughts to the contradiction, contempt, and insult, the injustice and cruelty, to which he voluntarily submitted; to the patience, meekness, serenity, and love which he manifested; or to the glorious event of his sufferings and death; we may, in every one of these reflections, as it were, hear him say, "Is it nothing to you all ye "that pass by? Was ever sorrow like unto my "sorrow?" Nor can we select one scene which does not most powerfully inculcate resignation, contentment, and thankfulness, whatever our circumstances and difficulties may be. For who has meaner provision, or is more injuriously treated, than the holy one of God, the spotless sacrifice for our numberless transgressions?

Faith receives also the instruction of scripture, concerning the necessity, nature, and glory of the Redeemer's undertaking, and obedience unto death upon the cross: and this suggests further motives to humble submission, admiring gratitude, and cheerful acquiescence in the will of God. The worth of our immortal souls, the evil and desert of sin, our ruined condition as sinners, and the unavailing nature of all earthly possessions or distinctions, with various other interesting subjects, are most emphatically enforced by Emmanuel's cross. Thus, while induced to use every means of securing our salvation; we cannot but grow more indifferent to subordinate interests, and better satisfied with a low and afflicted condition. In this school St. Paul learned contentment amidst his multiplied sufferings: yet, were we placed in his situation we should have far better reasons for our dissatisfaction, than we have been hitherto able to allege.

Neither must we forget that the believer feels himself to be an habitual pensioner on the Lord's mercy and bounty. He owns that he has no resources in himself: he can neither earn nor buy any thing, but indeed owes an immense debt of which he cannot pay the smallest part. He sues continually for pardon, through the sacrifice of the divine Redeemer, who bare the wrath due to our sins, that his salvation might consist with the honour of the law and government of God: and he is a constant suppliant at the mercy-seat of his offended Sovereign, expecting invaluable blessings from his royal bounty. He lives by faith; "Christ "is made of God to him wisdom, righteousness, "sanctification, and redemption." From his fulness his wants are continually supplied; and he experiences that his prayers are answered, his strength renewed, his hope encouraged, and his heart comforted, by "waiting upon the Lord." And shall a criminal thus favoured be dissatisfied? If he yield to murmurs or impatience under the common troubles of life, his inconsistency can only be equalled by his glaring ingratitude.

"Being justified by faith, we have peace with "God through our Lord Jesus Christ." When thus reconciled, we are admitted into a covenant of friendship; "and truly our fellowship is with "the Father and the Son." In proportion to our faith we enjoy peace of conscience, and the privilege of bringing all our cares, fears, sorrows, wants, and temptations to him by humble prayer; "casting all our care on him who careth for us." We become interested in all "the exceeding great and "precious promises" of the gospel, and that oath

by which the new covenant is confirmed, in order "that we might have a strong consolation, who "have fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set "before us." We are assured, "that all things "work together for good to them that love God, "who are the called according to his purpose:" and these considerations must powerfully tend to produce inward tranquillity, and that "peace of "God which passeth all understanding."

At the same time the godly man, in the exercise of faith, sees and acknowledges the hand of God in all the events of life. While we employ our thoughts on men or second causes, we become fretful and peevish; but when we view trials and injuries as the appointment of God, and realize his wisdom, righteousness, and truth in them, our hearts are rendered quiet and submissive. "It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him "good." "The Lord gave and the Lord hath "taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." "The cup which my Father hath given me, shall "I not drink it?" Such are the effects of regarding our abode, provision, employment, and even our crosses and sorrows, as appointed by our reconciled Father; and welcoming them as salutary medicines, or necessary though painful operations, intended for our highest advantage. Nor is this exercise of faith ever wholly separated from the happy experience, that our confidence is warranted, and our expectations answered; for in numerous instances we find those things, which seemed most against us, eventually conducive to our present comfort and future advantage.

It would engage us too long to pursue the sub-

ject into its various particulars. Reverential fear, admiring love, spiritual worship, well regulated passions, holy affections, with every hope and earnest of heavenly felicity, might easily be shewn to promote genuine permanent contentment.—On the contrary, whatever men may pretend or imagine, "the wicked are like the troubled sea, when "it cannot rest, whose waters cast forth mire and "dirt. There is no peace saith my God for the "wicked." Poets and novelists have beautifully described contentment, and have often charmed their admirers into a momentary oblivion of their sorrows: but this has made way for subsequent dissatisfaction with every situation and employment in real life. And all men of information know very well, that many of those very writers have rankled with envy and discontent, because the public has not rewarded their ingenuity with liberality proportioned to their self-estimation!—The citizen fancies that contentment dwells in rural obscurity; the rustic concludes that it may be found in the splendour and pleasures of the metropolis. Courtiers pretend to think that this pleasing companion is inseparable from retirement: the poor erroneously imagine that it may be found in palaces. Britons amuse themselves with descriptions of Arcadian groves: the Arcadians would probably conclude that none are so happy as the inhabitants of this favoured isle. But pride, ambition, an uneasy conscience, resentment, disproportionate or disappointed expectation, the insipidity of enjoyment when novelty ceases, the common troubles of life, and the dread of death, render men dissatisfied and uneasy in every place

nd station from the throne to the cottage. They ho have it in their power are continually shift- ıg from one place and pursuit to another; and ıch as are excluded from this privilege envy, rudge, and murmur. The world resembles a umber of people in a fever, who relish nothing, re always restless, and try by incessant change f place or posture to escape from their uneasy ensations; but all their efforts are in vain. Does ot this single consideration prove, that godliness the health of the soul, and that without it there an be no abiding contentment?

II. Then we inquire, in what respects godliness ith contentment is great gain.

There are certain ends, for which especially men esire riches. They suppose the coveted acquisi- on would add to their present comfort: secure em against many future disasters; furnish ma- rials for future enjoyment; prove an advantage their children; enable them to confer benefits their friends and relatives; and put it in their ver to be extensively useful. Perhaps all the *ons*, for which men pursue riches, may be re- d to these heads: for when avarice becomes treme, that money is coveted without any re- to its use, it degenerates into a kind of de- ble insanity.

it may easily be shewn that "godliness with entment" answers every one of these pur- far better than any increase of wealth. The of men, who perhaps also was the wealthiest, perimentally, "when goods increase, they creased that eat them: and what good is to the owners thereof, saving the beholding

"of them with their eyes?"[1] It is undeniable that increasing riches ensure additional cares, encumbrances, and dangers, rather than any accession of enjoyment. "The grounds of a certain rich "man brought forth plentifully:" but he was as much embarassed about securing his abundance, as his poor neighbours were about paying their rents or maintaining their families. Nor was he the only man who has viewed his treasures with anxious inquiries; What shall I do? where shall I secure them from danger?—Designing men find their advantage in paying court to the wealthy and employ their ingenuity to impose upon them. Thus they are often surrounded with sycophants instead of friends: and even friends become suspected; for the cordiality of confidence is undermined by repeated deceptions, till universal suspicion damps all social intercourse, and destroys the comfort of the most cordial attachments.

Nor does the rich man enjoy any pleasure with higher relish than formerly: he soon loses the exhilaration of new acquisitions and improvements: he has less to hope and more to fear than other men: his abundance and leisure often excite him to improper indulgences: his situation feeds the distemper of his soul; and in proportion as wicked passions predominate true enjoyment languishes. Something unpossessed, or unattainable, still makes him exclaim, "All this availeth me nothing:" "Mordecai will not bow to me:" "Naboth will "not sell me his vineyard!" while the attempt to obtain the coveted object, or revenge the

[1] Eccles. v. 11.

imagined affront, opens the door to new crimes and miseries.—No wealth can exclude pain, sickness, the loss of friends, or death: and the most prosperous are often "consumed with terrors," by the foreboding of calamities. Peace of conscience and hope of future bliss cannot be purchased, and the way, in which the wealth of ungodly men has been acquired and employed, renders the thoughts of "giving an account of their stewardship" unspeakably tremendous.

Perhaps there is no delusion so general, or so easily detected, as the opinion that increase of wealth implies an increase of enjoyment. Where is that man, who has risen from a bare competency to great affluence, that can honestly say he has proportionably augmented his happiness? And what numbers confess that their prosperity has been disappointment, and that all is vanity and "vexation of spirit!"

But it has already been shewn, that true godliness is inseparable from contentment: that it affords cordials in affliction, doubles the enjoyment of prosperity, and makes way for triumphant exultation in the prospect of death. The scripture sets before us many examples of believers, in the depth of poverty, in pain and sickness, bereft of friends or forsaken by them, insulted by persecuting enemies, conversant with stripes and imprisonment, and daily expecting a painful death; who have nevertheless been full of comfort, and have manifested a satisfaction of soul, which made them rather the objects of congratulation than condolence: nor are similar instances wholly unknown at present. But who can conceive a man under

the wrath of God, with a guilty conscience, the slave of his domineering lusts, and the sport of his restless passions, to be easy or comfortable in any situation? Godliness therefore does more towards making a man happy, than all other gains and advantages combined together.

But is not wealth a security against future disasters? Is it not a resource in sickness or old age, when trade declines, or when public calamities deprive men of the ordinary means of subsistence? —In some cases it may be *a duty*, in many *allowable*, to make a moderate provision against such emergencies: but it is often impracticable, consistently with our various obligations to God and man; and in ten thousands of instances it is done in a degree and manner incompatible with the exercise of faith, and in a worldly selfish spirit. On the other hand, vast multitudes yield to impatience, distrust, envy, and other tormenting passions, because they cannot succeed in their attempts to make such a provision. But godliness is the best security against future distress. Riches still are "uncertain," after every effort to change their nature, as late events have loudly preached to all the inhabitants of Europe. The most wealthy have no absolute security that they shall not end their days in a dungeon or an alms-house. Unforeseen failures often sweep away the property of the affluent: and in public calamities it is suddenly transferred, to the amazement of beholders; while the rich and noble are reduced to abject indigence and dependence, and their palaces are occupied by the lowest of the people! In many cases riches are considered as criminality; and

the possessors are proscribed for the sake of confiscations. When famine visits a land, the provisions that avarice had accumulated are frequently seized by an enraged multitude: nay, often the innocent possessor of abundance falls a victim to popular fury. Thus "riches are kept for the "owners of them to their hurt." And, if they prove insufficient for security in such cases, what can they avail in the agonies of pain, at the approach of death, or in the day of judgment?

But he who possesses that "great gain," which the apostle recommends, is liable to none of this uncertainty. "No good thing will the Lord with-"hold from them that walk uprightly." "Put thy "trust in the Lord, and do good, dwell in the "land, and verily thou shalt be fed." "Seek first "the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and "all these things shall be added unto you." "For "your Father knoweth what things ye have need "of." He hath all hearts in his hand, and all riches at his disposal. He needs not to work miracles (as in the case of Elijah,) in order to accomplish these promises; yet doubtless all nature would change its course, rather than God would disappoint an expectation warranted by his holy word. We know not indeed by what way our loving Father may see good in his infinite wisdom, to take us home to himself: but we are assured that every circumstance of that event shall be arranged in the most advantageous manner; and, till the appointed period shall arrive, no famine can render us destitute, no pestilence can sweep us away; the sword of war, the fury of a multitude, or the malignity of persecuting tyrants, cannot

reach us. We are safe, and ought to be confident, "though a host of men encamp against us:" for "the Lord of Hosts is with us, the God of Jacob "is our refuge." "All things are ours, if we be "Christ's:" we need not fear, though the earth be removed. "Death is our gain:" and this single effect of godliness infinitely exceeds in value the ideal philosopher's stone, the power of changing inferior metals into gold. Even "the day of "judgment and perdition of ungodly men" will be the season of the believer's complete redemption, to which we may now look forward with joyful hope. "O Lord God of hosts, blessed is the man "that trusteth in thee?"

But riches are valued as the materials of future enjoyment. "Soul, thou hast goods laid up for "many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be "merry: but God said, thou fool, this night "shall thy soul be required of thee."[1] Our present life is short and uncertain; "Man goeth to "his long home." On our journey we only want enough to bear our expenses: yet many a traveller groans, through a great part of the road, under the weight of an useless burden, which he must leave behind him on the shore, when he embarks for his eternal residence!—If riches yield little additional enjoyment during youth and health, they will fail still more in old age. Then the relish for every pleasure becomes languid, "desire fails," the organs of sensation wear out; but the passions retain their impotent dominion, unless subdued by divine grace. "Can thy servant taste what I

[1] Luke xii. 16—21.

"eat, or what I drink? Can I hear any more the "voice of singing men or singing women?"[1] The aged sinner resembles the sapless trunk of an old tree, when the branches are lopped off or withered. He clings to a joyless life from dread of death: yet the thought that he must soon die will intrude, and interrupt his expiring comforts. He becomes a burden to himself, and often to others: and, the greater his wealth is, the more reason has he to suspect that many wait for his death with concealed impatience.

Alas, and is this all! The sanguine youth, the active man of business, looked forward, in scenes of peril and fatigue, with the cheering expectation of affluence or preferment, and of tranquil enjoyment in declining life, as the reward of intense application. But how great is the disappointment even of the successful! Most of the candidates terminate their course before the expected season of repose, or languish out their lives in pain and sickness: the highest prize in this poor lottery has been described; while an eternal state is unprovided for! "Vanity of vanities, vanity of vanities! "saith the preacher, all is vanity!"

"But the hoary head is a crown of glory, if it "be found in the way of righteousness." The consistent Christian will not greatly regret the loss of pleasures which he has long comparatively despised: for he has resources in communion with God and the consolations of the Holy Spirit. Even if poor in this world, he commonly engages the cordial affection of some valued friends, whose so-

[1] 2 Sam. xix. 35.

ciety and attention solace the eve of life. Bodily pains and the loss of relatives are rendered tolerable by faith and humble resignation: while the near approach of death, and the prospect of heavenly joys, reconcile his mind to transient sorrows and separations. Past experience of the Lord's faithfulness and mercy inspires gratitude and confidence; which are rather increased than impaired by the consciousness of his own unworthiness.—"His outward man decayeth; but the inward "man is renewed day by day." Consolation often abounds "when flesh and heart are failing." Thus he meets death with composure, and then enters on that "fulness of joy which is at the Lord's right "hand for evermore." And is not then "godli-"ness with contentment great gain?"

When the lovers of this present world are silenced, in respect of these reasons for desiring increasing wealth; they excuse their conduct by pleading their families: and doubtless we ought to endeavour that our children may be provided for, and enabled to maintain themselves, when we shall be taken from them. But the desire of advancing them much above our own station in the community is injurious to them, both in respect to their temporal comfort, their character for prudence and good behaviour, and the interests of their immortal souls. How can any one greatly labour to enrich his children, if he do not himself idolize riches? How can he vindicate such an attempt, who believes the words of Christ; "It is "easier for a camel to go through the eye of a "needle, than for a rich man to enter into the king-"dom of God?" But a pious education, an edify-

ing example, many fervent prayers offered by religious parents for their children and with them, and the little spared from superfluous expenses to relieve the indigent, constitute a treasure of superior value: while habits of industry and frugality, the result of right principles, will, by the blessing of God, be far more advantageous than ungodly riches, inherited with the encumbrance of the crimes with which they have been acquired.

Neither can wealth enable a man to be useful to his friends and relatives, in any way or degree that may be compared to the advantages derived from godliness. To be capable of conversing in a pious and prudent manner with our acquaintance, of exhibiting religion before them in an amiable example, of recommending them to the Lord in our daily supplications, and of using divers means to render them wise unto salvation; these things when accompanied with uniform endeavours to serve them in their temporal concerns, will render us far greater blessings to them than superior affluence could do.—And, though men flatter themselves with the imagination, that they should do much good when they are grown rich; yet, supposing the best, (which rarely happens,) the most liberal use of ungodly wealth seldom compensates the effect of corrupt principles and a bad example, thus varnished over. On the other hand, the godly man, however poor, is a light in his neighbourhood and "the salt of the earth." He restrains the vicious, encourages the drooping, promotes piety and righteousness, professes and adorns the gospel, and in all respects is a blessing to every village, city, or nation in which he resides. The Lord pre-

served all who sailed with Paul in answer to his prayers: ten righteous persons would have preserved Sodom: and the scripture fully warrants me to say, that our national preservation hitherto is vouchsafed in answer to the prayers, and for the sake, of the pious remnant among us.—In all respects and in every view, "godliness with contentment is great gain," yea the greatest of gains; "It is profitable for all things; having the promise "of this life and of that which is to come."

III. Let us then conclude with some practical instructions.

Many young persons, being brought in the way of religion, think that godliness may be very proper in old age; as at that time of life people have little to do, and have no relish for juvenile pleasures. They perhaps allow that it will sometime be needful *for them* also; but they wish to defer the distasteful task to a more convenient opportunity. In the mean while, they purpose making a trial of the world; being determined not to believe that all is vanity and vexation, unless convinced by experience. The opinion, therefore, that religion is irksome and joyless, proves in this case a most fatal delusion of Satan. All desire *present* satisfaction; and few are willing to forego it for a distant and invisible felicity. Hence arises a procrastination that generally proves fatal. But, could we convince men that genuine piety would best promote their present satisfaction, one great obstruction to the gospel would be removed. You, my young friends, have doubtless found already, that disappointment and disgust often succeed to sanguine expectation: be persuaded therefore

we earnestly intreat you, to regard those who have dearly bought their experience, when they declare that this will more and more be the case as long as you seek that happiness in the world, which can only be found in God and religion. "Come" then, "taste and see how gracious the Lord is; "and how blessed they are that trust in him." Make a fair trial, whether peace of conscience and joy in God be not preferable to turbulent mirth, with an aching heart and bitter remorse.

But are not religious people often melancholy and uncomfortable?—No doubt many who speak about religion, and live at open war with their convictions, are very miserable. Others, taking distorted views of truth, and prematurely or disproportionately studying matters too deep for them, disquiet their minds and cast a gloom over their piety: while negligence, unwatchfulness, evil tempers, or cleaving to worldly objects, will render those uneasy who fear God or have any tenderness of conscience. But these effects arise not from godliness, but from the want of it; and they would vanish were the scriptures more implicitly believed and obeyed. We ought therefore to infer from these things, that we should carefully compare our religion with the word of God; and pray without ceasing, that we may be enabled to have "our con- "versation as it becometh the gospel of Christ."

Perhaps some of you, who have neglected godliness, meet with continual disappointment in your worldly pursuits. Does not the Lord then say to you, "Wherefore do ye spend your money for that "which is not bread? and your labour for that "which satisfieth not? Hearken diligently unto

" me—hear, and your soul shall live?" Few of the numerous candidates for wealth, honour, or power, are successful: and the most assiduous application has only the probability of success: but the unfailing word of God ensures the blessing to all, that " seek his kingdom and righteousness in *the first* " *place*" and in the way which he hath prescribed.

Are any of you, who trust that you possess godliness, oppressed by poverty, sickness, or trouble? Seek after contentment, my brethren: seek divine peace and consolations with redoubled earnestness; and strive to serve God cheerfully in the humble duties of your station. Watch against envy and covetousness, and a repining disposition. Learn to pity such as have wealth without godliness, and to pray for them: and be very cautious what measures you adopt to mend your outward circumstances: for " they that will be rich fall into temp- " tation and a snare, and into many foolish and " hurtful lusts which drown men in destruction " and perdition,"—or " pierce them through with " many sorrows."[1]

Finally, let the rich remember that they are only " stewards," and entrusted with wealth for the benefit of others. Let me charge you then, my brethren of superior degree, that you " trust not " in uncertain riches, but in the living God." That you be " rich in good works, ready to distribute, " and glad to communicate:" that you " do good " to all men, especially to the household of faith." Fear above all things having " your portion in this " life:" and remember, that of all your possessions

[1] 1 Tim. vi. 9, 10.

nothing is " your own," but " godliness with con-
" tentment," and such " things as accompany
" salvation." All else will soon be left behind.
Happy then are they and they only, who have
" chosen the good part that shall never be taken
" from them."

SERMON XI.

REVELATION III. 15, 16.

I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot: so then, because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of my mouth.

THIS chapter and that which precedes it contain a message from our blessed Saviour to each of the seven churches in Asia; which in one part or another suit the state and character of all Christian churches in every age and nation. It is therefore added at the close of each epistle, "He that hath "an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto "the churches."

The message to the Laodiceans differs materially from all the rest; for the professed Christians in that city had degenerated far more than any of the others. They were become "lukewarm," yet proud of their imagined proficiency: and the reproofs, warnings, and counsels of our Lord were adapted to this peculiarity of character and conduct.

We know that lukewarm water is exceedingly disagreeable; the stomach recoils at it, and we spit it out with loathing. Thus Christ declared that he would cast off the church of Laodicea with disdain and abhorrence. There might, however, be some individuals of a better character, though probably infected with the same disease, and others might be brought to repentance. For the

: of these, therefore, the message was sent: r were warned, rebuked, counselled, and en- raged; and we may hope that many derived :ial benefit. Yet the church at large seems to e degenerated more and more: so that, while ıe churches which our Lord mentioned with robation continue in some poor remains to this r day, there has not for a long time been a single essed Christian at Laodicea!—I purpose,

. To describe the nature and symptoms of :warmness:

I. To explain the grounds of that decided ab- :ence of it which Christ expresses:

II. To add something by way of solemn ning and particular application.

. We will consider the nature and symptoms ılkewarmness, both in collective bodies, and in viduals professing Christianity.

t may here be proper to premise one observa- , to prevent mistakes. When our advantages, ortunities, and obligations are duly considered, may all be justly charged with comparative :warmness: and the more we become acquaint- with ourselves, and experience the power of ne truth upon our hearts, the keener will be sensibility and the deeper our abasement on account. But this case is totally distinct from of the allowed and self-sufficient lukewarm- ı of the Laodiceans.

he disease of which we speak is only found re some profession of religion is made. The ligious world is not "lukewarm." Persons of character may say, 'We make no pretensions piety or sanctity; we seldom think about re-

'ligion; it is a subject that never gives us any 'concern.' Then indeed you are not chargeable with *lukewarmness:* you are clear of that crime: but if you pretend to no religion, what do you pretend to? Do you profess yourselves children of disobedience and of wrath, and heirs of hell? Is this your meaning, your character, your expectation? For, whatever you may suppose, these things alone belong to those who avow that they disregard God and religion.

But leaving such men to their own reflections, we observe that lukewarmness pre-supposes the form and appearance of a church; and that, possibly, neither very erroneous in doctrine nor corrupt in morals. In like manner the lukewarm professed Christian may retain "the form of sound "doctrine," avoid gross vices, and continue in communion with some religious society: he may even manage so well that no specific charge can be substantiated against him; no foul spot be visible in his character; no proof brought that he has renounced his profession. He may observe in some measure all the forms of godliness: but he wants the spirit, life, and activity of religion. We cannot say that he is dead: yet he resembles a deeply wounded man, for whom great fears are entertained even while symptoms of life seem discernible.

Ministers, who are conversant with the state of their flocks, generally class people according to their apparent characters, in their private judgment of them. Some are evidently in "the broad "way;" others are thought more promising, at least they desire to be so esteemed. But, among

some favorable tokens, many things appear very exceptionable: we would hope the best; but "what "meaneth this bleating of the sheep and lowing "of the oxen that we hear?" Something criminal or suspicious is observable in the shop or in the family: some duty is evidently neglected, or slightly performed: and this damps our fond expectations concerning them. Others are not wholly irreligious, nor is there any remarkable blemish in their conduct: but they are "neither "cold nor hot:" they do not appear serious, active, or zealous! and therefore we grieve over them, and stand in doubt as to the event of their profession. But there are some of another description; who are "our hope, and joy, and crown of rejoicing:" may God exceedingly increase the number of them! These are the ornament and credit of the gospel; from them the light shines with efficacious splendour: and their bright example, with the energy of their influence and fruitfulness, counteracts the pernicious tendency of loose profession to wound the interests of truth, and retard its progress.

But let us enumerate some particulars in which lukewarmness especially discovers itself. This may be observed, in the conduct of persons professing attachment to the peculiar doctrines of the gospel, in respect of the ordinances of public worship, and all the means of grace. The lively Christian says, "I was glad when they said unto "me, let us go into the house of the Lord." "O "God, thou art my God, early will I seek thee: "my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for

" thee, in a dry and thirsty land where no water
" is; to see thy power and glory, as I have seen
" thee in the sanctuary. Because thy loving kind-
" ness is better than life, my lips shall praise thee."
Hence you see him anticipating the opportunity of waiting upon God, as a man expects any season of pleasure and delight; and making preparation lest any thing should deprive him of the satisfaction he expects. He suffers not a trivial hindrance to prevent his attendance on religious duties; and, if he cannot break through intervening obstructions, he finds it difficult to bring his mind into a due resignation to the divine will. He does not inquire how often he is *bound* to attend the house of God: but rather rejoices when an opportunity offers on any day, which he can embrace consistently with other duties.

On the contrary, the lukewarm come reluctantly to the ordinances of divine worship; and are secretly pleased when an excuse, deemed sufficient, is suggested for absenting themselves. A visit or an invitation from a friend, some trivial business, a slight indisposition, or the inconvenience of unfavourable weather, is no unwelcome hindrance to their attendance at the house of God.—The same also is observable in respect of the Lord's supper, in which the lively Christian delights to commemorate the Redeemer's love; unless his mind has entertained some misconception about it. But such frivolous excuses, as keep the lukewarm from public worship, operate still more effectually in leading him to absent himself from the Lord's table: unless it be a convenient part of that form,

by which he maintains his credit and quiets his conscience; for in other respects he regards it as a matter of indifference.

We may further observe, that lukewarm persons commonly consider the sermon as the principal object, and think little of joining with reverence and fervency in other parts of divine service. They commonly therefore come late to the places of worship, and disturb the devotions of such as are more zealous. They are also ready to say to ministers, "Speak to us smooth things;" 'Discourse on soothing and consolatory topics; avoid 'awful and distinguishing subjects, and do not 'offend the audience with plain dealing.' Such persons are peculiarly attentive to the manner, the voice, and delivery of the preacher: if these be graceful and suited to their taste, they are more easily satisfied in other respects. Above all they recommend brevity: 'Let the sermon be short, 'the prayer short, and make haste to dismiss us.' For they are soon weary of an employment so little congenial to their prevailing disposition. They attend from custom, or amusement, or to pacify conscience; they delight not in the sacred service, and are reluctant to be "detained before "the Lord."[1]

But, if this be the case as to public worship, what can be expected in respect to family-religion? If this be not totally neglected, it is very superficially and irregularly conducted. Business, engagements, amusements, or visitants, easily induce the lukewarm to omit it entirely; or it is hurried

[1] 1 Sam. xxi. 7.

over at an unseasonable hour, when perhaps several of the family are half asleep. Thus the souls of children and domestics are neglected: and every person of discernment and observation must be convinced, that, according to all human probability, the religion of such persons, whatever it be, will die with them. Indeed the families of the lukewarm have few advantages above those of the irreligious: while they are led to believe, that an evangelical creed will suffice to bring a worldly man to heavenly felicity.

Some of the old divines have observed, that 'apostacy begins in the closet;' and the same may certainly be said concerning lukewarmness: for, even when our hearts are truly engaged in religion, we find it difficult to maintain habitual fervour and devotion in secret duties. It is therefore obvious to conclude, that they who are cold and formal in public and family worship must be still more remiss in private. This, however, falls not under observation, but the lukewarm cannot but be conscious of it. Indeed the grand difficulty of the Christian's course consists in duly attending to self-examination, meditation, and secret devotion: our sharpest conflicts with Satan and our own hearts will generally be about these duties. While all goes well with us in this respect, we shall be carried through trials and services with comfort and advantage; but, when we grow negligent in secret, our public conduct will after a time be less respectable and edifying. This is, as it were, the pulse of the soul, by which we may best judge whether it be healthy or otherwise. So tha the difference between a lukewarm and a

zealous Christian must here be peculiarly observable to a man's own conscience.

The two characters may also be discriminated by the company which they prefer. Business or incidental circumstances may carry the most zealous believer into the society of worldly men; but he goes among them from a sense of duty; he is out of his element and bears a cross all the while; and he feels a quick sensibility and a watchful jealousy, lest he should disgrace his profession, or sustain detriment from so incongenial an association. When the necessity ceases, he consequently returns to the society of pious persons; and he habitually says with David, "I am a com-"panion of all them that fear thee, and keep thy "precepts." But the lukewarm finds numerous pretences for visiting and loitering among ungodly associates, and for joining in some of their vain amusements, Their profane conversation or frivolous behaviour do not render him very uneasy: and it happens unfortunately that he has some objection against every one of his acquaintance who is strictly religious. This man, though pious, is uncourtly or unpleasant in his demeanour; the other, on a certain occasion, said an impertinent thing; and the third hath given just cause of offence. Thus men of this character excuse themselves to their own consciences, as well as to others, while they separate from the company of religious people: and consequently they more and more approximate to the spirit and maxims of their chosen companions. They yield to solicitation in one instance, and then say, 'What harm 'in this?' They go a little further, and urge the

same excuse. They plead for conformity to the world in one thing after another, till almost every trace of distinction vanishes; and then they regard it as a mark of a liberal mind to maintain no singularities, and not to thwart the humour of the company: till at length they often come within the immediate attraction of the whirlpool, and are swallowed up beyond recovery!

The lukewarm professor reverses likewise the maxims of the gospel, in the pursuit and use of worldly things. He *first* seeks prosperity or indulgence; and vainly hopes that "the kingdom of "God and his righteousness will be added to him," without any peculiar concern or exertion. If he can maintain a hope that he is *safe*; he has no regard for the honour of God, the interests of the gospel, the salvation of souls, or advancement in holiness. In order to maintain his confidence, he looks perhaps to some past experience of the power, which divine truth had on his heart and conscience: this he concluded at the time to be conversion, and he still endeavours to satisfy himself in the same manner; abusing some important doctrines of the gospel to support his hope, notwithstanding his present conduct. If spoken to on this subject, he feels, and probably expresses, great displeasure; but in other respects he is destitute of sensibility. But the zealous Christian is very suspicious of himself, and bears patiently to have the ground of his confidence investigated. He is ready to say on such occasions, 'Have I not 'said or done something, which counteracts my 'earnest desire to glorify God my Saviour, and 'to recommend his gospel to my fellow sinners?

'Have I not been betrayed into evil tempers or 'inexpedient indulgences, which may give others 'an unfavourable opinion of my religious princi-'ples? Have I not mis-spent my time, and neg-'lected to improve my talents? Have I avoided 'the appearance of evil, and taken care that my 'good should not be evil spoken of?' These are constant subjects of self-examination and sources of humiliation to the zealous Christian, of which the lukewarm know scarcely any thing: for they seldom think of our Lord's words, "Herein is my "Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so "shall ye be my disciples."

It might be supposed that persons, so deficient as to the grand essentials of Christianity, could not enjoy much comfort in religion; yet they frequently exhibit the appearance of high assurance and abundant consolations: for every good thing may be counterfeited. There are ways, by which men may conceal their lukewarmness even from themselves; and acquire a kind of intoxicating self-complacency. A man may be very zealous for some appendages of religion, while extremely languid about religion itself. He may contend earnestly for certain doctrines, or for some peculiarities of discipline and church government; and defend his sentiments with great ability and fervour. His boasting, reviling, and bitterness, are indeed additional proofs that he is little acquainted with genuine Christianity: yet the ardent zeal which he feels and expresses in the cause, as he supposes, of truth enables him to conceal his real character from himself.

There are however, some who deceive them-

selves in an opposite manner. They call their luke-warmness *candour*: they contend for no doctrine or peculiarity, and this is *moderation* in their use of the word. Every sentiment is with them a matter of indifference: they allow every man without disturbance to hold his own opinion; hoping that all, or most of them, will be found right at the last; this they call *charity*, the principal grace of Christianity!—But in fact such men do not value the truth: and they impose on themselves by fair pretexts; while they prefer ease, credit, and interest to the glory of God and the cause of the gospel. The spirit of persecution is in these lands, exceedingly abated, for which we have reason to bless God: but it may be questioned, whether this affected and idolized indifference about divine truth be not an evil of almost equal enormity. This fashionable way of thinking dignifies "lukewarmness" with the name of *candour*, secures it from censure, and teaches a man to be a Christian without offending the bitterest enemies of Christianity! But are not such men "ashamed "of Christ and his words," in this corrupt and evil generation? And will not he be "ashamed of "them," when he shall come in glory to judge the quick and dead?

Rashness and imprudence are often manifested in "contending for the truth once delivered to the "saints:" but shall we on this account be silent and satisfied, when Christianity or its leading doctrines are denied and vilified? Is there no profession of the name and doctrine of Christ required from his disciples? Are the peculiar instructions of revelation become matters of no consequence

ith professed believers?—When, however these ıestions are answered, it may further be re-arked, that these very *candid* men forget their acid moderation among zealous Christians; and equently become warm, if not disdainful and tter disputers against evangelical principles!

I shall only add one more peculiarity of the kewarm professor of the gospel; for the sub-ct is almost inexhaustible. He is commonly stinguished by a proportionable measure of ıiritual pride. Confident of his superior wis-ım and attainments, he arrogates to himself, in most every respect, the pre-eminence among his ethren. The apostle pointed out this symptom the disease to the Corinthians, when he said, Now ye are full, now ye are rich, ye have reigned as kings without us.—We are fools for Christ's sake, but ye are wise in Christ; we are weak, but ye are strong; ye are honourable, but we are despised."[1] Yet, while they were thus puffed p, "their glorying was not good;" and the doc-inal and practical errors and evils, which had ɔen sanctioned among them, were almost incre-ibly many and dreadful! The church at Laodi-a also said, "I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knew not that she was wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked;" which is the exact ɔscription of spiritual pride. So that this is one ıvariable symptom of lukewarmness, as well as a ıuse of its prevalence: for a high opinion of our tainments uniformly leads to something mean

[1] I Cor. iv. 7—10.

and grovelling, and "a haughty spirit goes "before a fall."

II. We proceed then to explain the reasons, for which our Lord expressed such marked abhorrence of lukewarmness.

When he said, "I would thou wert cold or hot; "so then because thou art lukewarm and neither "cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of my mouth," we cannot suppose he meant that such professed Christians were always more wicked, or in greater danger of perdition, than apostates or notorious profligates: though considering their advantages, obligations, and ingratitude, they may be often in fact more heniously criminal. I apprehend, however, that our Lord especially referred to the dishonour done by the lukewarm to his name, and to the mischievous consequences of their infectious and disgraceful example. Every one knows that a bad servant may do ten times more mischief, while he remains in the family, than he could do were he dismissed from it: and in like manner lukewarm professors do far more harm to the cause of Christ, by pretending to religion, than they could do by openly renouncing Christianity. One Achan in the camp caused more trouble and loss to Israel, than all the hosts of the Canaanites: "Neither" says the Lord, "will I be with you any "more; except ye destroy the accursed thing "from among you."[1]

Corrupt professors of Christianity have in all ages been the grand obstruction to its progress.—Mr. Brainerd, in the narrative of his mission

[1] Josh. vii.

ong the Indians, observes that he had great ficulty for a long time, to erase from their minds uspicion that he had formed some design of in- ing them under a pretence of preaching the spel: so frequently had they been defrauded by minal Christians! This is the case, in one way other all over the globe: and the principal im- liment to the success of the gospel in this land ses from the same cause. Lukewarm professors re irreligious people an unfavourable idea of angelical doctrines. The prejudice against them indeed naturally very strong, and men imagine y tend to licentiousness: but, were there no se characters among those that contend for se principles; were they all "a peculiar people, ealous of good works;" this objection would n be silenced, and men would be ashamed of s calumniating their conscientious neighbours. It is likewise well known, that we profess to perience "joy and peace in believing;" to find ways of religion pleasant and delightful: and choose rather to be "door-keepers in the house of the Lord, than to dwell in the tents of ungod- liness." 'All this,' say worldly people, 'sounds ery well: yet these devout believers frequently ome to borrow a little of our pleasure, and seem s intent as we are in securing a portion of our ood things.' How can such men be convinced t there is superior excellency or satisfaction religion; while they see us cleaving to the rld, and reluctant to renounce what we affect despise?

The lukewarm are also the bane of those who ve been newly impressed with a sense of divine

things. Under the preaching of the gospel, thoughtless sinners are awakened to a concern about their eternal interests; their consciences become uneasy, and their minds attentive to instruction: they are convinced that many doctrines which once they disregarded are true and important, and perceive the necessity of renouncing sinful pursuits, and of separating from their old associates; and they become diligent in attending on the means of grace. But, if in this hopeful frame of mind, they come in the way of lukewarm persons, whose strong attachment to certain truths, and plausible address beguile their unexperienced hearts; they are easily seduced into false notions of *liberty*, not "in keeping God's commandments," but in disregarding them: and they gradually lose their tenderness of conscience, and diligence in "labouring for the meat that endureth unto ever-"lasting life." They are now taught, that strictness in duty and self-denial deduct from the freeness of divine grace: and various insinuations of this kind poison their minds with prejudices against the ministers and Christians, among whom they were first excited to inquire after salvation. Thus numbers, who apparently set out well, by means of an unsuspecting attention to persons of this description obtain a false peace, and finally settle among formal, disputations, or antinomian professors. These are "the little foxes that spoil the "vines" just when the tender grapes begin to be formed; and thus give most poignant grief to faithful pastors, while they witness, but cannot prevent, the perversion of those who they hoped would be "their rejoicing in the day of Christ."

But indeed the preachers of the gospel are themlves more exposed to temptation from the lukearm, than from all other men whatever. We ve like passions with our neighbours: and, when e have forfeited the friendship of the world by hering to the truths of the gospel, we are rectant to meet also the frowns of religious people. et, unless we stand firm against the insinuations Laodicean professors, and venture their keen proaches and calumnies, we shall not deliver ore than half our message; we shall separate e practice from the doctrines of Christianity; id pass over, in general and inoffensive terms, ose very subjects which the state of our congations requires to be most fully and plainly nforced. And, as lukewarmness commonly preils more among the wealthy than the poor, our nger is very great: for their favour is both reeable and advantageous, and their disapprotion exposes us to serious inconveniences, and ten threatens great distress. Thus ministers lie nder strong temptations to "shun declaring the whole counsel of God," to "keep back some things profitable to the people," to speak softly id timidly, to call this prudence and candour, id perhaps to join in censuring such as are more ithful to God and the souls of men. Either ich cases are not unfrequent in this metropolis, r I greatly mistake the meaning of the scriptures, id that of the words and actions of mankind. We should, however, seriously consider the apose's words; "If I were a man-pleaser, I should no longer be the servant of Jesus Christ."

In these and many other ways the lukewarm

disgrace the gospel and retard its progress: they weaken the hands, disconcert the measures, and even ruin the simplicity of the ministers of Christ; while they damp the ardour, or mislead the earnestness, of real Christians. Can we, therefore, any longer wonder at our Lord's decided language against such pernicious characters? Let us then,

III. Apply the subject in solemn warnings and particular exhortations.

Our blessed Saviour seems to address himself to the Laodicean church, to the following effect. 'Thy lukewarm spirit and conduct are so contrary to the design of my religion, and the obligations conferred on my disciples, so dishonourable to my name, and so injurious to mankind; that I am determined to give an awful lesson to all other churches, by casting thee off with contempt and abhorrence: I will therefore deprive thee of all thy abused privileges, and no longer leave thee the name or form of my holy religion.' In like manner, my friends, whenever any kingdom, city, church, or congregation becomes like the Laodiceans, it will surely and speedily be deprived of its religious advantages; "the candlestick will be "removed out of its place;" and this will be accompanied with other tokens of divine indignation. Thus interpreted, the words are indeed awfully prophetical: and, when lukewarmness becomes general in any church, however distinguished or denominated, it is a certain prognostic of approaching judgments, either spiritual or temporal.

But the application to individuals is more im-

mediately the province of the preacher. We do not indeed say that every person, infected with this disease, is a hypocrite and will prove an apostate; but we affirm most constantly, *that the case is awfully dangerous.* "Let no man deceive you "with vain words:" let none persuade you to consider this as a trifling matter. "If any man "be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things "are passed away; behold all things are become "new." He has not only adopted a new creed; but he has received a new heart, and leads a new life: he "is created in Christ Jesus unto good "works." How then can it be possible for a man to know that he is in Christ, unless he be conscious of this change, and manifest it in his whole disposition and conduct? Will any one say, he knows himself to be in a state of acceptance because he has a strong impression that this is his privilege; because texts of scripture were brought to his mind to assure him of it; and because he has had many comfortable seasons under religious ordinances? If his spirit and practice do not at all accord to that of the Christian, as described in the oracles of God, ought he not to conclude that "Satan, transformed into an angel of light," has deceived him; and that he "builds upon the sand," by "hearing the words of Christ, and not doing "them?" And how can he know but that the storms and floods of death and judgment will sweep away his baseless edifice, with most tremendous destruction? They who "call Christ, "Lord, and do not the things that he says;" even if they perform many wonderful works in his name, and receive extraordinary gifts from him; will at

the last day be compelled to "depart as workers "of iniquity:" and what will then become of their anti-scriptural confidence?

The tares and the wheat must "grow together "till the harvest;" the wise and foolish virgins will form one company till the coming of the bridegroom; and guests who have not the wedding garment may remain unnoticed, till the king come to see them: but the final discrimination, with its eternal consequences, will be dreadful to those who had "a name to live, and yet were "dead."

Supposing, however, a man's lukewarmness not fatal; yet the uncertainty and the apparent danger of his condition are sufficient to excite great alarm and distress. If he be saved it will be "as "by fire:" and what a gloomy prospect, what terrors and remorse upon a death-bed, are before him? These are the only tokens for good of which his case can admit: for unshaken confidence at the hour of death, succeeding an evidently lukewarm profession, proves that a man is given over to a strong delusion. Remember then, and may the Lord impress it deeply on every heart! that consternation and anguish, when death approaches, form the brightest prospect of the lukewarm Christian! And is this the provision you are making for that awful crisis? Is this your intention when you yield to indolence, temptation, and the seduction of bad examples?

You may probably, my brethren, censure my address as harsh and severe; but I hope you will observe, that it is far below the energy of reproof and warning employed by the loving Saviour

himself: yet he spake to those among whom some persons seem to have had a few feeble sparks of grace, as fire covered and almost extinguished by the ashes.

But some perhaps continue to quiet their minds, by thinking that they make no pretensions to religion, and are not therefore concerned in the rebuke. Let me however demand of you, whether you have not been "baptized in the name of the "Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost?" Have you then openly renounced your baptism, and abjured Christianity? Or do you expect to be called Christians? If you do, this implies a profession of religion, however unmeaning and hypocritical: and your indifference about these subjects proves you the most lukewarm of all that bear the name of Christ. And is this your confidence? or do you intend to plead this before the tribunal of your judge? Would not such an excuse then prove before men and angels, that you had "crucified "Christ afresh and put him to open shame?" and that you had "done despite to the Spirit of grace," by a course of conduct diametrically opposite to the religion which you professed?

Should these solemn reflecticns excite any of you seriously to inquire what you ought to do, the answer is obvious, Consider the salvation of your souls as your grand concern: forego or postpone all other pursuits, rather than suffer them to retard your course in seeking an interest in the Saviour of sinners. Be diligent, earnest, and persevering in attendance on all the means of grace. Repent, and bring forth fruits meet for repentance. Se-

parate from the world with all its sensual pleasures and stupifying dissipations: and seek your present happiness, as well as future safety, in the favour and service of our gracious God and Father.

If you doubt whether all this be necessary, I appeal "to the law and to the testimony." "Search "the scriptures:" see whether they do not require us to give the Lord our hearts and devote ourselves entirely to him: and whether the language of Christ, concerning self-denial, renouncing the world, enduring the cross, labouring and striving to enter in at the strait gate, be not much stronger than any thing here stated. If any of you should not be able to reconcile these passages to your views of salvation by grace; be assured that your views are unscriptural; and beg of God to open your understanding that you may more clearly discern the truth as it is in Jesus. But beware of indolence and partiality in reading the scriptures: do not select a few passages, and pass over the rest, as unsuitable to your system, or uninteresting to you; for this springs from *lukewarmness*, and tends to its rapid increase.

But are any of you convinced that you have hitherto been infected with this Laodicean spirit, and almost ready to tremble for the consequences? Let me call your attention to the subsequent part of our Lord's address to such lukewarm professors. He condescends to say even to them, "I counsel "thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that "thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that "thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of "thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine

"eyes with eye-salve, that thou mayest see. As "many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zea- "lous therefore, and repent."

Think then frequently and intensely on eternity and its infinite importance: meditate seriously on the death of Christ; the design, manner, causes, and effects of it; the instructions conveyed, and the obligations conferred, by that great event. Pray earnestly for the sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit, which alone can prevent or cure lukewarmness, and maintain the life and power of godliness in the soul. Examine particularly every part of your disposition and conduct: be willing to know the whole of your case as it really is. Withdraw from the company of the lukewarm, and associate with zealous Christians: and never admit a doubt, but that the more fervent, diligent, and fruitful you become, the greater will be your peace and comfort in life and death, and the more abundant your gracious recompence in the realms of blessedness.

We have all of us, my brethren, considerable cause for humiliation in this matter; and have need to redouble our diligence in using all these means, that we may make progress, and "grow in 'grace." But while the Lord says to all; "Be- 'hold I stand at the door and knock; if any man 'hear my voice, and open the door, I will come 'in to him, and will sup with him, and he with 'me:" he adds, for the encouragement of those who are "fighting the good fight of faith," perhaps with conscious feebleness and many fears, "To him that overcometh will I give to sit down

" with me upon my throne; even as I al
" overcame, and am set down with my Fath
" on his throne." " He " then " that hath an
" let him hear what the Spirit saith unto
" churches."

SERMON XII.

MATTHEW V. 16.

your light so shine before men, that they may e your good works, and glorify your Father hich is in heaven.

t blessed Lord just before his ascension into ren, thus addressed his apostles: "All power given unto me in heaven and in earth: go ye erefore and teach all nations, baptizing them the name of the Father, and of the Son, and the holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all ings whatsoever I have commanded you."[1] ice we learn, that there is a measure of in- ction which precedes an intelligent profession he gospel, comprising the first principles of doctrine of Christ; and that there is also a e particular and exact instruction, by which isters should endeavour to form the judgment, direct the conduct of believers, in all the se- l parts of Christianity. This distinction ought e carefully remembered; that we may not sup- the practical exhortations given to believers ersede the necessity of regeneration, repent- e, and faith in the Son of God, as numbers n to think; nor yet deem it inconsistent with purest evangelical views, to explain particu-

[1] Matt. xxviii. 18—20.

larly, and inculcate most earnestly, the several parts of our duty to God and to our neighbour.

In the sermon on the mount, our Lord first shews, in the several beatitudes, that happiness principally depends on the state of the heart; and then, addressing the disciples in the presence of the multitude, he said, "Ye are the salt of the "earth: but, if the salt have lost its savour, where-"with shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good "for nothing but to be cast out and trodden under "foot of men." Christians, as scattered over the earth, ought to communicate a purifying savour of piety and righteousness, and thus to prevent the increasing depravity of the human race: but graceless preachers and professors of the gospel are the vilest and most hopeless of men.—"Ye "are," says Christ, "the light of the world; a city "set upon a hill cannot be hid. Neither do men "light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but "on a candlestick, and it giveth light to all that "are in the house." True Christians, placed in different families, villages, streets, cities, and nations, diffuse the light of divine truth, received from the Sun of righteousness, in their several circles. This also renders them conspicuous: their tempers, words, and actions will surely be observed and exactly scrutinized. Nor were they enlightened from above in order to be immured in cloisters, or to retire into deserts, like lamps put under a bushel: but it is the Lord's will, that they should resemble candles placed on candlesticks in the midst of a room, to give light to every part of it. Therefore "let your light so shine before men, "that they may see your good works, and glorify

"your Father which is in heaven."—It may be proper for us,

I. To consider the persons to whom this exhortation is especially addressed:

II. To examine more fully its import: and

III. To state the object which we should aim at in complying with it.

I. The persons to whom the words are especially addressed.

Some expositors seem to confine the exhortation to the apostles, or to the ministers of the gospel, exclusively. But, though the words are peculiarly proper and energetic in this application, yet it is evident that all Christians are, in their own circle and measure, "lights in the world;" and all who profess Christianity may be exhorted to act consistently with their avowed character. In other parts of scripture similar exhortations are addressed to believers in general. The evangelical prophet, viewing the church as a disconsolate female sitting in darkness upon the ground, thus encourages her, "Arise, shine; for thy light is "come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon "thee. For behold the darkness shall cover the "earth, and gross darkness the people; but the "Lord shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall "be seen upon thee: and the gentiles shall come "to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy "rising."[1] When the light of the glory of God in the face of Christ illuminates the church, then she arises from the dust, reflects the bright beams of the Sun of righteousness, and shines as a light to

[1] Isa. lx. 1—3.

the gentiles. The gospel is sent "to give light "to them that sit in darkness and the shadow of "death, to guide their feet into the way of peace;" "to open their eyes, and to turn them from dark-"ness to light, and from the power of Satan unto "God:" and, when these effects are produced, men "are made the children of light and of the day," and are exhorted to a consistent deportment.[1] St. Paul addresses the Philippians in words very similar to those of this text: "Do all things without "murmurings and disputings; that ye may be "blameless and harmless, the sons of God, with-"out rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse "nation, among whom ye shine" (or "shine ye") "as lights in the world; holding forth the word "of life, that I may rejoice in the day of Christ "that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in "vain." And St. Peter uses language to the same effect: "Ye are a chosen generation, a royal "priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people; "that ye should shew forth the praises of him who "hath called you out of darkness into his mar-"vellous light."[2]

But we need not multiply proofs in so plain a case. The apostles derived a primary splendour from Christ, "the light of the world;" and their light shone before vast multitudes with peculiar lustre. The ordinary pastor diffuses the same light in his circle, and according to his measure: and the meanest Christian has his little influence and a few observers, among whom too his light

[1] Luke i. 79. Acts xxvi. 18. Eph. v. 8—14.
[2] Phil. ii. 14, 16. 1 Pet. ii. 9.

may be made to shine. Even nominal Christians, being favoured with the light of truth, are inexcusable, in proportion to their advantages, in not receiving and communicating the inestimable benefit. For "this is the condemnation, that light "is come into the world, and men love darkness "rather than light, because their deeds are evil."

This may suffice to shew that we are all concerned in the exhortation: for in our favoured land, and our peculiar situation, we have every advantage for aiming to "let our light shine be-"fore men:" and if we do not "we have no cloke "for our sin;" so that it will be more tolerable in the day of judgment for Sodom and Gomorrah than for us.

II. We will then examine more fully the import of the exhortation.

God hath made other men his instruments in communicating to us the light of the gospel; and we should desire and endeavour to impart the benefit to others also: though we may seem rather lamps in the street, or candles in the room, than luminaries in the firmament of heaven. The means to be used for this purpose may vary, according to our several employments, abilities, and relations in life: but we all ought to have the same habitual design of bringing our neighbours and friends to the knowledge of God and themselves; of the holy law and the gospel of salvation; of the way of peace and the path of duty; and of all other things which pertain to evangelical piety.

In order to accomplish this purpose, it is requisite that we make an explicit profession of our

wisdom and sovereignty of his providence, are maintained. Connected with these doctrines, man's accountableness to his Creator and Governor, a future judgment and a state of eternal retributions; the fallen condition of the human race, the evil and desert of sin, the justice of God in the condemnation of sinners, and his free mercy in their salvation, are strenuously insisted on: and the person, redemption, and mediation of Emmanuel, Jesus the Son of God; regeneration and renewal unto holiness by the Spirit; repentance and fruits meet for repentance; justification by faith alone; love to the Saviour constraining to devoted obedience; and patient continuance in well-doing, animated by the hope of eternal glory, are the principal topics to which the attention of the auditors is called. These things are evidently enlarged upon in some congregations, and not in others: and, if a man be convinced that they are the doctrines of scripture, he ought seriously and statedly to attend at some place of worship, answering to this description; avowing that his conduct is the result of examination, conviction, and regard to the authority of God. In doing this, not only hearing the sermons, but joining in every part of the service with reverent devotion, and associating with those who hold and adorn the same principles, he will make a very distinct and intelligible profession of his faith: and, in bringing his family, and others whom he can influence, to attend on the same ordinances, he may "let his "light shine before men," and exhibit an edifying example to his neighbours. To render this the more impressive, he should not only appropriate

the Lord's day to this purpose, but embrace opportunities of attending on any day when it does not interfere with other duties: coming early, and shewing in his whole deportment that he takes delight in the worship of God, and in hearing his word. Such a conduct tends exceedingly to draw men's attention to the gospel, and to promote vital godliness in the world.

It may further be observed, that all these ends are more decidedly answered, when the believer, after mature deliberation, statedly attends at the same place of worship, than when he wanders from one to another: for thus he sets an example of constancy in his attachment to the truths and ordinances of God; and he more effectually ensures the attendance of his family. Perhaps it may be added, that this conduct indicates a more healthful state of soul, and best promotes "growth "in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and "Saviour Jesus Christ."

Our light should also shine before men by instructive and pious conversation. "The mouth "of the righteous speaketh wisdom and his tongue "talketh of judgment:" and it is remarkable, that the most opposite effects are ascribed to the tongue in the sacred scriptures. The psalmist calls it "his glory:" and Solomon declares that "the mouth of a righteous man is a well of life:" that "the tongue of the just is as choice silver;" that "the lips of the wise feed many;" and that "the tongue of the wise is health."—On the other hand, "The tongue is an unruly evil, full of deadly "poison:—it is a fire, a world of iniquity;—it "setteth on fire the whole course of nature, and

" is set on fire of hell."[1] The fact is indeed undeniable, that the gift of speech, when abused, is the grand instrument in the propagation of atheism, infidelity, impiety, blasphemy, heresy, licentiousness, discord, and every other evil, through private circles and large communities, all over the earth. Yet this same gift, under the influence of divine teaching and holy affections, is also principally instrumental in diffusing the light of the gospel among mankind: not only by public preaching; but by the private instructions of parents and masters, and by familiar conversation. The speech of prudent zealous Christians, being " seasoned with salt," being pure, pious, and affectionate, " ministers grace unto the hearers." It is therefore emphatically true, that " life and death " are in the power of the tongue;" " for out of " the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." If then we be the disciples of Christ, and partakers of his grace, we shall, after his example, " from " the good treasure of our hearts bring forth good " things." For, even if we " keep our mouth as " it were with a bridle " from all corrupt discourse, but do not embrace opportunities of profitable conversation; we shall be found guilty of burying our talent in the earth.

All indeed have not the gift of properly introducing religious topics in mixed companies, where they are too generally unwelcome, however prudently and seasonably managed: but every man has a little circle, in which he may speak with freedom on the great concerns of salvation. Most

[1] Jam. iii.

persons have relatives, and many have families, among whom they are peculiarly bound to communicate the knowledge of the gospel. There are also seasons in which almost any one will endure the serious and affectionate introduction of religious subjects; especially in times of peculiar affliction, or when death hath visited his house. In some companies a man is, as it were by common consent, called to take the lead in discourse, and may select his subject: and in most situations some opening will be found for a serious remark, which may be afterwards recollected, if it do not at the time introduce further conversation. The event of such reflections frequently gives us reason to say, "A word spoken in due season, how good "is it!" And upon careful examination it will be found, that far more good is done in this way than is in general supposed.

An objection, however, will naturally arise in the mind of many, from the consideration of the aversion and contempt commonly expressed for this kind of conversation. But it is certain that the rules, prescribed by the Lord himself to his people, could not be reduced to practice, without exciting the same disgust and reproach.[1] Even the conduct of Christ must be involved in the same censure: for he hath set us an example of this duty, and also of the manner in which it ought to be performed. In fact, the opposition of men, who have no habitual seriousness in religion, rather recommends, than forms an objection to pious discourse: and surely we ought not to neg-

[1] Deut. vi. 6—9; xi. 18—21.

lect any part of our duty from that "fear of man "which bringeth a snare!" "Thus saith the "Lord, hearken unto me, my people, who know "righteousness, in whose heart is my law: fear "ye not the reproach of men, neither be afraid of "their revilings: for the moth shall eat them up "like a garment, and the worm shall eat them as "wool: but my righteousness shall be for ever, "and my salvation from generation to genera-"tion."[1]

They, who timidly and cautiously keep silence on these subjects; who leave men in ignorance and under delusion, even among their own acquaintance; and make no effort to enlighten them with saving truth, lest they should be censured and stigmatized with some reproachful name; must act in direct contradiction to this solemn admonition. Whereas a prudent and suitable attention to this duty forms one of the most efficacious means of diffusing the savour of truth and piety, in families and neighbourhoods; and of opening a door of usefulness to those who labour in the word and doctrine.

There are indeed many vain talkers, who disgrace the gospel; disregarding relative duties and every rule of propriety, by an ostentatious zeal and officious boldness in disputing about doctrines while it is often too plain that the truth has little sanctifying effect upon their own hearts. It is therefore peculiarly incumbent upon us to ask wisdom of God, in order to a right performance of this duty; and to be very careful that our reli-

[1] Isa. li. 7, 8.

gious discourse be recommended by the ornament of a consistent behaviour in all other respects. This is especially the way to "let our light shine "before men." Thus Peter, exhorting Christians to "have their conversation honest among the "gentiles, that, whereas they spake against them "as evil doers, they might by their good works, "which they should behold, glorify God in the "day of visitation;" inculcates the duties of subjects to their rulers: "for," says he, "so is the "will of God, that with well-doing ye may put "to silence the ignorance of foolish men." He then states the duties of servants, even to severe and froward masters; adding, "for what glory is "it," (what proof of grace or what recommendation of the gospel,) "if when ye be buffeted for "your faults ye take it patiently? but if when ye "do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, "this is acceptable with God; for even hereunto "were ye called." Afterwards he exhorts, "wives "to be in subjection to their own husbands, that, "if any obey not the word, they may without the "word be won by the conversation of the wives." And, having mentioned some other subjects, he thus concludes the exhortation: "Having a good "conscience, that whereas they speak evil of you, as "of evil doers, they may be ashamed that falsely "accuse your good conversation in Christ."[1]

In like manner, magistrates, masters, husbands, parents, children, and all others, have various relative duties to perform for the common benefit: and, if they be known to profess the peculiar doc-

[1] 1 Pet. ii. iii.

trines of the gospel, which are generally accused of tending to laxity of morals, their conduct will be severely and minutely scrutinized. But, when believers study to understand and aim to practice the duties of their several relations, in all respects, more exactly than before; when they habitually give up their own humour, interest, or indulgence, provided conscience be not concerned, to oblige and serve those that are most prejudiced and unkind; and when this conduct is adhered to with meek perseverance, notwithstanding discouragements and ungrateful returns: then the excellency of evangelical religion is exhibited in the clearest and most affecting light. In this manner we ought "to adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all "things."

A conscientious exactness, as to every part of our conduct in the ordinary transactions of life, is likewise indispensably necessary; that they may be conducted with the strictest integrity, veracity, sincerity, and punctuality. We ought to "let "our moderation be known unto all men:" it should be evident "that our conversation is with-"out covetousness;" and nothing ambiguous or suspicious should be observable in any of our dealings. A harmless and inoffensive deportment also is peculiarly necessary: we ought to keep at a distance from intermeddling in other men's affairs: from slander and discord; and from every word and action, which may prove injurious to the interest, peace, reputation, relative comfort, or ease of any other person; as far as this can be done consistently with other duties.

An evident disposition to kindness, benevolence,

and compassion, is another ornament and recommendation of the gospel. Nor is affluence, or extensive liberality, requisite in order to diffuse this benign light around us: provided our exertions bear some proportion to our ability. A loving spirit may be manifested in a narrow sphere, by a continual attention to little incidents; and by such beneficent actions as are within the power of every man whose heart is properly disposed.

These tempers ought to be associated with forbearance and gentleness under insults and injuries; a readiness to forgive repeated and most trying provocations; and persevering endeavours to "overcome evil with good." And, when the believer is also willing to acknowledge, without reserve, the mistakes and faults into which he may have been betrayed; and to make suitable concessions and amends to all whom he has in any respect offended; "his light shines before men" in a very resplendent manner. Patience and resignation also, in those trying circumstances which excite others to peevishness and rebellious murmurs; cheerful contentment at a distance from those pleasures, which most men deem the solace of life; moderation and regard to expediency in the use of things lawful; indifference about distinctions, pre-eminence, or applause: and discretion in the management of secular affairs, contribute to recommend, and consequently to diffuse, the light of divine truth.—This is more especially the effect of a diligent improvement of our talents, according to our rank in life, or our situation in the church; by employing wealth, authority, influence, genius, learning, and every endowment,

with a steady aim to promote the cause of true religion in the world, and to render mankind wiser, holier, and happier, by every means we can devise.

By a combination of these dispositions, and an habitual regard to every part of our conduct, according to the brief hints here given; avoiding extremes, rashness, harshness, and affected singularity; endeavouring to unite a courteous obliging behaviour with religious constancy and fortitude; and studying the proprieties of our several stations; we may, I apprehend, comply with our Lord's exhortation, and "let our light shine before men."

III. We proceed then to consider the object which we ought to propose to ourselves in attending to these duties.

It has been hinted, that our light should shine "*before men*," and not at a distance from human society. They who quit the active scenes of life to which providence has called them, that they may cultivate piety in privacy and retirement, too much resemble such soldiers as decline the combat, and refuse to face danger or endure hardship in the service of their country. Some employments indeed are absolutely irreconcilable with a good conscience: but, when this is not the case, it is generally the believer's duty to "abide in his "calling." Christianity suffices to teach every man, from the monarch to the slave, how to glorify God and serve his generation, by a diligent and self-denying performance of the duties belonging to his station. And this is the best method of exhibiting before men the nature and efficacy of that remedy, which God hath devised for the disorders of this evil world.

Our Lord, in this same sermon, warns his disciples not to do their "works to be seen of men:" yet here he requires them to "let their light so "shine before men that they may see their good "works." Our actions, however good in themselves, are corrupt in their principle, if they spring from vain-glory, or are made known with ostentation; as if we sought human applause. But, if we "abound in the fruits of righteousness," and "patiently continue in well doing," it will be impossible that our good works should be wholly concealed. Our Lord "went about doing good;" and he always shunned human observation in his constant exercise of beneficence, as far as his circumstances would admit of it: yet his love and power were undeniable, and "his fame spread "abroad" through the adjacent regions. Indeed almsgiving, prayer, and fasting, of which Christ spake afterwards, generally demand secrecy: but hypocrites especially seek glory by openly performing them: while the habitual tenour of a sober, righteous, and godly life, must be visible to those among whom we reside. Yet even here we ought to watch against every degree of ostentation. But there may be occasions, in which the honour of God and the edification of our brethren, may require us to make known even those parts of our conduct, which should in general be concealed. Thus Daniel opened his windows, and prayed three times a day, as a protest against the impious decree of Darius, or rather of his ministers; and the primitive Christians publicly sold their estates, to provide for the needy. And thus martyrs, in prison or at the stake, prayed singly in the most

open manner, though at other times accustomed to retire into a closet.

The object which we are instructed to propose to ourselves, in making our light "shine before "men," is this, "that they may glorify our Father "which is in heaven:" and our conduct may be regulated in most cases, by carefully examining how that end may be most effectually attained. So far from our good works conducing in any degree to our justification before God, even the gracious recompense, promised to the fruits of the Spirit in the hearts and lives of believers, is not so much as mentioned in the passage before us. Higher and nobler motives are exclusively proposed; motives in which self-love is allowed no gratification, except we can find pleasure in glorifying God and doing good to men.

The people of the world have in general a very unfavourable opinion of evangelical doctrines. "The preaching of the cross is to them that perish "foolishness;" and the plan of redemption seems to many of them irrational, inconsistent, and calculated to level all distinctions of character and capacity, and to militate against the interests of morality and science. They therefore commonly entertain a contempt for a man's understanding, when they discover that he has zealously embraced this religious system: and the disgusting conduct, or extravagant notions, of too many who profess these doctrines, confirm these fatal prejudices, and furnish them with anecdotes and objections with which to oppose the truth. But when a man soberly avows his belief of the gospel, and "is ready "to give a reason of the hope that is in him, with

" meekness and fear;" when he discourses rationally on other subjects, and behaves with increasing propriety and consistency in all his various relations and engagements; the prejudices of observers gradually subside, and they begin to allow that his principles are not so intolerable as they once conceived them to be. Finding that, while he decidedly resolves " to obey God rather than " man," he also is ready to serve or oblige others, when he can do it with a good conscience; and that his conduct, when most exactly scrutinized, appears to the greatest advantage; and feeling perhaps that their own interest and comfort have been materially advanced by the change: they are prepared to receive more favourably any hint he may drop concerning the salvation of Christ; to read a book that he earnestly recommends, or to give the preachers of the gospel an occasional hearing. Thus many are led to an acquaintance with the truths of Christianity in the most attractive manner; their aversion and contempt are almost imperceptibly removed; and one after another is brought to the knowledge of Christ, and faith in his blood. Then a new light is set up to shine before men, that others may see *his* good works also, and be won over to join in glorifying our God and Father.

The Lord alone, it is true, can open the understanding and change the heart: but he almost always uses means and instruments; and the pious example and zealous endeavours of Christians, as well as the preaching of the gospel, are blessed to the conversion of sinners. Every believer therefore should habitually design and endeavour to be useful in this manner, within his proper sphere;

and propose it to himself as the grand object of his future life, to which all other pursuits ought to be subordinated, and if possible rendered subservient. He should watch over his tempers, words, and actions; and endeavour to regulate them in such a manner, that they may give the utmost energy to his attempts to recommend the gospel to his family and acquaintance. It should be his constant aim to strengthen the hands of faithful ministers; and to shew in his own conduct, the reality, excellency, and beauty of pure religion, and its tendency to render men happy and useful.

When this is carefully and generally attended to, the number of real Christians will commonly be multiplied; the light of life will be more widely diffused; and the grain of mustard seed will become a large plant.

We cannot reflect seriously on this subject, without lamenting that there are but few *Christians* even in nations professing Christianity. The man who hears an express command of Christ with contemptuous neglect, and habitually disobeys it, cannot reasonably expect to be thought his true disciple; yet who can deny that immense multitudes of professed Christians do thus treat the exhortation contained in the text?—Let none then be offended with us for distinguishing between true believers, and those who say to Christ, "Lord, Lord, but do not the things which he "says:" for, as he will shortly come, and make a complete and final separation, it is of the utmost consequence to every one, that he learn his real character and condition, before the door of mercy and hope be for ever shut against him.

Let each individual, therefore, seriously and

impartially inquire, whether he have that inward evidence of having believed and obeyed the gospel, which arises from a fervent desire that God may be glorified in the conversion of sinners, and from an uniform endeavour to "let his light shine "before men," for that purpose. If this be wholly wanting, the most exact creed and the strictest form of godliness will prove entirely unavailing. The Judge at his appearing will silence all such pleas, by saying with awful indignation, "Depart "from me, all ye workers of iniquity." In proportion as we are doubtful whether this be indeed the ruling principle of our hearts, and the plan of our lives; we should question whether our faith be living, and our hope warranted. We are, however, invited to come to Christ as sinners for salvation: and if we really accept of this invitation, "giving diligence to make our calling and elec- "tion sure," the subsequent change will constitute a "witness in ourselves" that we are partakers of Christ, and that his Spirit dwelleth in us.

Finally, my Christian brethren, we all need to be deeply humbled, that we have not "let our "light shine before men" in that measure, and to that effect, which our peculiar advantages and obligations rendered incumbent on us. Let us then confess and lament our unfruitfulness: and, while we humbly crave forgiveness of the past, let us earnestly beseech the Lord for a larger measure of his grace; that we may henceforth "walk more "worthy of God, who hath called us to his king- "dom and glory."

SERMON XIII.

JAMES I. 22—25.

But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For, if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: for he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.

The apostle James seems to have especially intended his epistle as an antidote to the delusion of those who abused the doctrines of grace; and who, expecting salvation by a dead faith, considered good works as altogether superfluous. This may account for the remarkable difference between his language and that of St. Paul, who was chiefly employed in contending against such as ran into the opposite extreme. Having therefore shewn that temptations and sins must not be ascribed to God, the unchangeable giver of every good and perfect gift; and observed that the word of truth is the grand means of regenerating sinners, and rendering them willing to consecrate themselves to God; he gives some directions concerning the manner in which men hear and receive

the divine message, that it may be "in them an "engrafted word, able to save their souls." He then introduces the passage which I have chosen for the subject of our present meditation, and concludes with these remarkable words: "If any man "among you seem to be religious, and bridleth "not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart; "this man's religion is vain. Pure religion and "undefiled before God and the Father is this; to "visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, "and to keep himself unspotted from the world." The religion which God approves, when viewed apart from the principles whence it springs, and the ordinances through which it is produced and maintained, is chiefly manifested by self-denying kindness to men for the Lord's sake, and separation from all the pollutions of this evil world. "Now," says St. Paul, "abideth faith, hope, and charity; "but the greatest of these is charity."

The text viewed in this connexion, may give us an opportunity of considering,

I. The peculiar intent of revelation, and the purposes which it was evidently intended to answer:

II. The inefficacy of hearing without practising, to accomplish any of these purposes:

III. The nature and sources of that fatal self-deception into which numbers are in this respect betrayed:

IV. The contrast betwixt the mere hearer and the practical student of scripture.

I. We consider the peculiar intent of revelation, and the purposes which it was evidently intended to answer.

"The Lord made all things for himself," that in different ways they might manifest his glory. The inanimate creation, in every part, proclaims his wisdom, power, and goodness, and demonstrates his being and perfections. "The heavens declare "the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth his "handy-work." Each of the animal tribes answers the end of its creation, and enjoys all the felicity of which it is capable; except as involved in the consequences of our sins. But rational creatures should glorify their Maker in a higher manner; being formed capable of understanding the display he has given of himself in his works, and of rendering him the reasonable service of adoration and obedience: in which, as connected with the ineffable enjoyment of his love, their genuine felicity consists. Yet, without at all considering the difference observable in men's characters, it is undeniable that all "have forsaken the fountain "of living waters: and have hewn out for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no "water." This is the universal apostacy and idolatry of the human race: they are all "alienated "from the life of God." None seek their happiness in knowing, loving, obeying, and worshipping him; but all, if left to themselves, idolize the creatures, and expect felicity from the possession and enjoyment of them. It might easily be shown that this is the prolific source of all the vices and miseries of mankind, however varied and multiplied. The idolized objects of their several pursuits are unsuitable and insufficient for their happiness: moderate possession and use give not the expected satisfaction: and hence spring intem-

perance and licentiousness, with all their dire effects. The devotees of riches, power, fame, or pleasure become rivals, and interfere with each other: thus their malignant passions are excited, and they are tempted to the most destructive and atrocious crimes. The departure from God makes way likewise for rebellion, enmity to his perfections and government, and direct opposition to his commands and cause: and hence spring impiety, infidelity, atheism, superstition, every species of false religion, and every form of virulent persecution.

Thus man has forfeited his felicity in the favour of God, incurred his awful displeasure, lost his own capacity of enjoying a happiness adequate to his desires, and rendered himself the slave of the vilest affections. And, as happiness is in its own nature one and unchangeable, he could by no means have avoided the most dreadful miseries, during the whole of his existence, had not his offended God brought "life" and felicity, as well as "immortality, to light by the gospel."

It is therefore the especial intent of revelation, to make the one living and true God known to his apostate creatures, in the mysteries and perfections of his nature, as far as necessary; in the righteousness of his law and government; and in his readiness to shew mercy and confer happiness even on rebellious man. It was evidently the design of the Lord to bring us back to himself; to provide for the pardon of our sins, and to give us a title to eternal life, in a way honourable to his perfections; to reduce us to a proper disposition of mind, that we might thankfully receive these blessings and make due returns for them; to effect a cordial

reconciliation between himself, the great and glorious Creator, and us rebellious creatures; and to teach us to love, reverence, worship, and obey him, that, being renewed to his holy image, we might enjoy true happiness for evermore in his favour and service.

Revelation was also intended to train up a people, who might be the instruments of God in promoting his cause among men; in alleviating and counteracting the miseries and mischiefs of the world; and in doing good to one another, till their removal to a state of perfect holiness and felicity. Finally it was designed to bring fallen men to that blessed state; that being made equal with the angels, they might for ever unite with them in the most sublime worship and delightful service of their infinitely glorious Benefactor.

Now, if these are the special ends and purposes of revelation, as every impartial and diligent inquirer must be convinced they are, we may readily see,

II. The inefficacy of hearing without practising, to accomplish any one of them.

But the importance of the subject is inexpressible, and demands a more particular investigation. The apostle supposes in the text, that the persons he addressed did hear the *word of truth*, and not false doctrine: for, the more deeply men are impressed by erroneous sentiments, and the more entirely these become practical principles, the greater mischief is done; as such deluded persons are inflated with pride, buoyed up in self-confidence, and encouraged in gratifying their corrupt passions even as a part of their religion. These are the produce of the "tares," which the enemy

sows in the field while the servants sleep: but the self-deceivers, that abound where the good seed is sown, are such hearers as receive the doctrine of truth into a carnal mind by a dead faith, and pervert it through the artifice of Satan and the deceitfulness of their own hearts.—Our present business therefore lies with those who statedly, or occasionally, attend on the real gospel of Christ.

It may here be proper to make a digression in order to mention some descriptions of *hearers only, and not doers;* that we may hold the mirror to every individual, and help him to discover what manner of man he is.—Many persons form a part of our congregations, who come from habit or constraint. Children or domestics belonging to religious families, and many others in different situations, are accustomed to attend divine service, where the word of truth is preached. They know that this is expected from them: and they submit to it, as a stated tax on their inclinations, which they pay for the sake of coincident advantages. Such persons commonly forget that *they* are addressed by the preacher, and concerned in his instructions. They come and go, as it were, mechanically; but scarcely think of complying with the exhortations which are most earnestly enforced. They receive the seed "by the way-side;" and "the devil takes it away, lest they "should believe and be saved."—If this observation should reach the ears of any persons who answer to the description, let them remember, that for once at least *they* were particularly addressed; that the subject comes home to their case; and that not only the preacher, but the apostle speaks

to them, as if by name, saying, "Be ye doers of "the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your "own selves."

There are likewise *speculating* hearers, who study religion as other men do mathematics: either to gratify curiosity and love of discovery; or because they hope to render it subservient to worldly interest and reputation; or vainly imagine that a sound creed is the one thing needful, the sure and only passport to heaven. These men are often very severe on blind Pharisees, who think to be saved by "a form of godliness:" but they cannot see that a *form of knowledge* is equally worthless, and far more dangerous; because it produces a more desperate kind of pride and self-preference; for "knowledge puffeth up." They consider hearing, speculating, disputing, and criticizing preachers and doctrines, as the whole of religion. Their notions abide inactive in their minds, and produce no change of character. Even the apparent morality or piety, which is sometimes connected with them, results from other principles; while their spirit and conduct, in many respects, are diametrically opposite to the real tendency of the doctrines for which they contend. Such persons, however, seldom persevere in stated attendance, where the *whole* truth is preached: and, as the completion of their system is the main object with them, they often grow weary of hearing even that partial statement which they approve, and which they have fully understood.

Another description of hearers mistake *the means of becoming religious for religion.* They hear several sermons every week from their fa-

vourite preachers: though perhaps they scarcely understand, and never bestow any pains to remember and practise, what they hear. Sometimes they ground their confidence on attending such ministers as are noted for distinguishing faithfulness; and, as they manage to endure this plain-dealing, they suppose themselves approved; for they understand that many hypocrites are offended by it. But at the same time, they never seriously think of examining themselves by the doctrine, or of following the exhortations, thus repeatedly inculcated.

We must by no means omit to mention those hearers of the gospel who seek *entertainment* in places of worship, when conscience remonstrates against other amusements. These are *amateurs* of oratory, good language, and graceful delivery; they admire the flights of a fine and vigorous imagination; or perhaps they are pleased with close reasoning, or the discussions of an acute logician: though numbers of this class are as deficient in judgment as in piety. They gratify themselves, however, by hearing preachers whose talents suit their taste, whatever that may be. This employment sometimes agreeably fills up a vacant hour which might otherwise be tedious: and they *endure* even the truth for the sake of the *manner* in which it is delivered! Such persons attended Ezekiel. "Lo thou art to them," said the Lord to his prophet, "as a very lovely song of one that hath a "pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument: for they hear thy words but they do them "not."[1]

[1] Ezek. xxxiii. 30—34.

The *captious* hearer likewise requires to be noticed. He comes on purpose to criticize and find fault; to try every one's doctrine by his standard; to discover his own acuteness by detecting some error of the preacher; and to "make a man an "offender for a word." He seeks for nothing but the bran or the chaff, and these alone he carries away. He means not to *learn*, much less to practise: and he must therefore be "a hearer only, "and not a doer of the word."—I would not, however, have you to conclude that we deem our auditors obliged to credit all we say, or precluded from the free exercise of their judgment. Men may diligently compare our doctrine with the scriptures, and differ from us in many particulars; while they edify by every sermon, and are "doers "of the word:" for they may examine with sobriety, humility, and candour; and differ with reluctance and earnest prayer to be directed aright. But the captious hearer resembles a man who turns with disgust from a plentiful table because he dislikes some one dish. Nay, he goes to the feast, not to eat, but to shew his delicate and fastidious taste by finding fault with the provisions!

Time would fail should we consider the *curious* hearer, who goes to find out what some celebrated preacher has to say, perhaps that he may turn it into ridicule; the *procrastinating* hearer, who intends to practice when he has a more convenient opportunity; and many others, who might in like manner be arraigned and condemned.

It must, however, be obvious, that all such persons fall short of every purpose for which the word of God was mercifully given. "How do ye say,

" we are wise, and the law of the Lord is with us?
" Lo, certainly in vain made he it, the pen of the
" scribes is in vain."[1] The word of truth continually calls them to consider their ways, and examine their hearts and lives, that they may become acquainted with their state and character: this they *hear* indeed; but continue careless and inconsiderate! They are " warned to flee from
" the wrath to come;" but they flee not: and they are invited " to come to Christ that their souls
" may live;" but they " refuse him that speaketh." Wisdom thus expostulateth with them: " How
" long ye simple ones will ye love simplicity, and
" scorners delight in their scorning, and fools hate
" knowledge? Turn you at my reproof: behold
" I will pour out my Spirit unto you; I will make
" known my words unto you:" but " they set at
" nought all her counsel, and despise all her re-
" proof." They are commanded to repent, and
" to cast away all their idols and transgressions;"
but they cleave to their sins, and, " after their
" hardness and impenitent heart, treasure up wrath
" against the day of wrath, and revelation of the
" righteous judgment of God." They are exhorted
" to pray without ceasing;" but they seem to say,
" What is the Almighty that we should serve him?
" or what profit shall we have if we pray unto him?"
They pay no practical regard to Christ, while he commands them to " labour for the meat which
" endureth unto everlasting life;" " to strive to
" enter in at the strait gate," " to search the scrip-
" tures," " and to take his yoke upon them." They

[1] Jer. viii. 8.

hear indeed; and admire or object, as their notions are sanctioned or opposed: but if Christ be "the "author of eternal salvation to those," and those alone, who *obey him*;" and if all they be his enemies, "who will not have him to reign over them;" such persons will as certainly perish as any description of sinners whatsoever. Nay, a partial obedience, which interferes not with their inclinations or interests, does not warrant them to expect a more favourable doom: "for he that keepeth "the whole law and offendeth in one point is guilty "of all." According to the law itself a man is condemned for a single transgression; and, according to the gospel, he who habitually commits one known sin, is adjudged a hypocrite and unbeliever. If this were not so, Herod might have retained Herodias; nor would it be necessary for us to part with the right hand or the right eye which causes us to offend.

Whether we consider revelation as intended to reconcile us to God, to make known to us the way of peace, to be the means of our renewal to holiness, to prepare us for glorifying God on earth, to fit us for enjoying his love in heaven, or to teach us to do good among men and serve our generation: it is evident that hearing without practising fails entirely of accomplishing any one of these purposes. This is so obvious in itself, and so constantly inculcated in every part of scripture, that it would be almost incredible that any man should be deceived by so palpable a cheat, were it not most lamentably common: nor can this fact be accounted for, but by allowing that "the heart

" is deceitful above all things, and desperately " wicked."—We consider,

III. The nature and sources of that fatal self-deception into which numbers are in this respect betrayed.

It is observable that the apostle does not here warn us against the artifices of " Satan transformed " into an angel of light," or those of " his minis- " ters transformed into the ministers of righteous- " ness." These indeed will never be wanting in subtle endeavours " to beguile the souls of the " simple :" yet they can *fatally* deceive none who are not disposed to deceive themselves.—It may also be remarked, that such persons seldom impose on other men. The ministers of Christ " stand " in doubt of them ;" nay, are often fully convinced of their awful delusion, and, with tears of affection, risk their displeasure by trying to undeceive them: but such endeavours are generally ascribed to harshness, prejudice, or calumny. They seldom deceive consistent Christians, as they may discover by the shyness and reserve of their conduct; while frankness and cordiality mark their social intercourse with more approved characters. Nay, the people of the world can commonly distinguish really pious and upright believers from mere speculating professors. Many of them court the society of such self-deceivers, while they fear meeting with persons of eminent sanctity: they can endure any creed, provided men's example sanction their spirit and conduct: and, as such professors " are of the world, there- " fore the world loveth them," while it hates those

whom Christ hath chosen out of the world. There are, however, men that make no great pretensions to religion, who respect such as are consistently pious: yet they join with those who honour them by their hatred, in heartily despising him who is a hearer of the word, and not a doer.

But let us consider some of the methods by which such men deceive themselves. The sacred scriptures ascribe the salvation of sinners wholly to *grace*, or free unmerited mercy; and declare that none of our own righteousness has contributed, or can contribute, to procure the inestimable blessing: now, some general notions of this fundamental truth help numbers to deceive themselves. Not considering salvation in its extensive meaning, as comprising the whole of our reconciliation to God and recovery to holiness: but confining their thoughts merely to pardon and justification, they infer that good works must *in all respects* be excluded from our views of the gospel. It is indeed most true, that "we are justified freely by "the grace of God, through the redemption that "is in Christ Jesus:" but it is equally true, that the will and power to perform real good works is an essential part of our salvation. "By grace "are ye saved, through faith; and that not of "yourselves, it is the gift of God: not of works "lest any man should boast. For we are his work-"manship, created in Christ Jesus *unto good works*, "which God hath before ordained, that we should "walk in them." "The grace of God, which "bringeth salvation, teacheth us that, denying "ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live

"soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present "world."[1]

This is the uniform language of the New Testament; and it is most evidently rational: for the renewal of a fallen creature to holiness is as needful, important, and unmerited a favour, as pardon and the gift of righteousness by faith: but, for want of attending to this, numbers take occasion from the doctrines of grace to deceive themselves. Indeed many use unscriptural expressions, which are extremely liable to misconstruction; and give a disproportionate statement of the truth: yet it must also be allowed, that the very words of scripture may in this manner be perverted. Thus Peter observed, concerning the writings of his beloved brother Paul, that "in them were some things "hard to be understood, which they that were "unlearned and unstable wrested, as they did the "other scriptures, to their own destruction."[2]

The language of the sacred writers concerning *faith* is likewise most decided: "He that believeth "and is baptized shall be saved; and he that be-"lieveth not shall be damned." By faith alone, and by no other operation of the mind or action of the life, can the sinner be made partaker of the righteousness and redemption of Christ. But, while numbers presumptuously use language diametrically opposite to that of holy writ, there are many who deceive themselves by a misapprehension of the scriptural doctrine. Various arguments have convinced them that certain opinions are

[1] Eph. ii. 8—10. Tit. ii. 11—14. [2] 2 Pet. iii. 16.

rtue, and they dispute earnestly for them. Surely, say they, we *believe*; and, if we believe, we have all things in Christ, "who of God is made to us "wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and re- "demption." Hence they conclude that practice should only be insisted upon in general terms; and, while secular motives restrain them from scandalous immoralities, they imagine that all is well, and that nothing further is required. But they do not duly consider the difference between dead and living faith: and that justifying faith works by love, purifies the heart, overcomes the world, and produces unreserved and zealous obedience. And, while they give peculiar attention to St. Paul's argument concerning justification by faith, they overlook the account he gives of the holy fruits produced by faith; especially in the conduct of Abraham and Moses, and other ancient believers, as stated in the eleventh chapter of his epistle to the Hebrews.

The word of God gives us abundant reason to expect that the true believer's experience will confirm and attest the sincerity of his faith. "He "that believeth on the Son of God hath the wit- "ness in himself:" "Having believed, ye were "sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, which is "the earnest of our inheritance." "The day "dawn and the day-star shall arise in your hearts."[1] The meaning of these scriptures, and many others to the same effect, is very important; and teaches us that the real disciples of Christ experience such effects in their own souls, from believing the doc-

[1] Eph. i. 13. 2 Pet. i. 19. 1 John v. 10.

trines and relying on the promises of the gospel, as abundantly satisfy them that the Lord is faithful to his word, and that he both comforts and sanctifies his people by the truth. But numbers deceive themselves by a counterfeit experience. They have been alarmed, have changed the ground of their confidence, have had their imaginations heated or delighted by impressions and visionary representations: they have recollected the promises of the gospel, as if spoken to *them* with peculiar appropriation, to certify them that their sins were forgiven: and, having seen and heard such wonderful things, they think they must no more doubt their adoption into the family of God. They have also frequently heard all experience profanely ridiculed as enthusiasm: and this betrays them into the opposite extreme; so that they are emboldened to despise every caution, as the result of enmity to internal religion, and to act as if there were no delusive or counterfeit experience. But the event too plainly shews their awful mistake; and that they grounded their expectations upon the account given of the extraordinary operations of the Holy Spirit on the minds of prophets, rather than on the promises of his *renewing influences* in the hearts of believers. When therefore they lose the impressions with which they once were elated, they relapse nearly into their old course of life, their creed and confidence alone excepted. The seed of the word, which had sprung up, "withers, because it hath no root:" they are "not doers, but hearers only, deceiving their own-"selves."—But the seal of the Spirit, like that applied to the melted wax, leaves an indelible im-

pression; and the image of Christ will in some measure be discernible in the temper and conduct of those who have received it, through all changes to the end of life.

We are but little acquainted with the real character and secret conduct of each other, except in the most intimate relations and connexions; especially in populous cities. We see men attend on public ordinances, we hear from them, in occasional conversation, the language of believers, and we know nothing concerning them inconsistent with these appearances. It is our duty to love the brethren, and to speak comfortably to them. Charity "hopeth all things," and "thinketh no "evil:" we therefore behave to such men as brethren; and this circumstance helps many to deceive themselves. The self-flattery of the human heart is inconceivable, and its effects prodigious: so that numbers put the candid opinion of ministers or Christians, who scarcely know any thing of them, in counterpoise against the accusations of their own conscience, respecting the secret sins which they habitually commit. They even persuade themselves that allowed crimes are of the same nature with the infirmities which believers humbly confess and deplore: and thus they maintain a confidence in direct opposition to scripture, and call it *faith*; nay, they deem this a high attainment, and "hope against hope," in a sense, with which neither Abraham nor Paul was at all acquainted.

Mistaken notions of liberty likewise lead men into fatal delusions: for, instead of counting the service of God 'perfect freedom,' and seeking de-

liverance from the yoke of sin and Satan, from love of the world, and from the fear of man; they imagine liberty to consist in living according to their own inclinations, without remorse of conscience, or dread of consequences: just as numbers can have no idea that they enjoy civil liberty, unless they be allowed to indulge their selfish passions without restraint. When therefore we exhort them to submit to the easy yoke of Christ, and to serve him in holy obedience; they exclaim that this is *legal*, and leads them into bondage: and they choose such teachers as "promise them "liberty, while they themselves are the slaves of "corruption."—These are a few of the innumerable ways, in which men deceive themselves, by hearing the word of truth without reducing it to practice.

But whence arises this fatal propensity to self-deception in a matter of infinite importance? Our Lord answered this question when he said "Every "one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither "cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be "reproved." The human heart is prone to idolize the world, and to seek happiness in the enjoyment of it; and is averse to a life of practical godliness. But, when a man is at all acquainted with the doctrines of the Bible, his conscience becomes an unquiet inmate, unless some way be taken to silence its remonstrances. Various methods have therefore been adopted of reconciling a worldly life with the hope of future happiness: and self-flattery, which palliates a man's vices, and enhances the value of his supposed virtues, is a powerful coadjutor in this attempt.—But among these plans per-

haps no one is so cheap and convenient, as hearing and assenting to the gospel: if a man be able to persuade himself that such a faith will save him. This requires less trouble and self-denial than any other system: while it helps him to ascribe that decency of conduct, which secular motives impose, to his religious opinions; and to consider all his omissions and transgressions as defects which are common to believers. A superficial hearer of the word may thus easily suppose that he is in the way of salvation, while he lives in habitual disobedience to the known commandments of God: and, when the faithful address of a minister shakes this vain confidence, the man may be seduced to charge the blame on the doctrine, and to shrink from conviction by going to those places where smoother and more comfortable things are spoken.—Could we therefore witness all that passes in the retirement, the family, and the dealings of those who after a time forsake our ministry, we should perhaps not be at all surprised at losing them, though we must grieve to discover such awful self-deception.

These are the sources of this evil, which will certainly terminate in everlasting ruin unless it be previously discovered and remedied.

IV. We consider, lastly, the contrast here stated between the mere hearer and the practical student of scripture.

The word of God, that "perfect law of liberty" through which the believer is freed from bondage and condemnation, is compared by the apostle to a mirror; in which a man beholds the reflection of his person, and by which he may adjust every

thing in his appearance after the most becoming manner. The mere hearer resembles one who gives a transient look into this mirror; but, taking little notice of his appearance, and bestowing no pains to alter any thing in his attire, "he goeth "his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner "of man he was." Thus many give a slight attention to the truth, and get a transient glimpse of their own state and character: but they dislike the mortifying discovery, are uneasy under the fleeting conviction, and have no inclination for that repentance and conversion, to which the scripture calls them. They therefore try to believe that approbation and assent may suffice, and that the gospel does not require practice. They go and plunge themselves into business or pleasure, and soon forget their convictions: and thus remain ignorant of their accumulated guilt and urgent danger, and strangers to regeneration, reconciliation to God, the life of faith, the sweet obedience of love, and all those "things that accompany sal-"vation."

On the other hand, the man who stedfastly looks into the scriptures, comparing all his conduct, past and present, and even his thoughts, affections, tempers, motives, and words, with the holy law; who thus learns his whole duty to God and his neighbour, according to all his various relations and obligations; and who continues daily considering his ways, and contemplating himself in this faithful mirror; will soon become acquainted with his own heart and character, and perceive his need of the mercy and grace proposed in the gospel. By persevering in this course of self-exami-

nation, without being offended by the discoveries he makes: he will speedily understand that he ought to humble himself before God, for sins more numerous than the hairs of his head: and experience will convince him, that he can neither atone for the least of his former transgressions, nor answer the righteous demands of the divine law; nay, that he cannot truly repent, except by the promised assistance of the Holy Spirit. His daily efforts will bring him more and more acquainted with his sins of omission and commission, the defilements of his duties, the hidden evils of his heart, the strength of his depraved propensities, and the power of habits and temptations. These things will render him weary of attempting to "establish his own righteousness," or to change his own nature. He will now be capable of understanding the words of the apostle; "By the works "of the law shall no flesh be justified in the sight "of God, for by the law is the knowledge of sin." The publican's prayer, "God be merciful to me a "sinner," he will now most cordially adopt; and the nature, glory, and preciousness of the free salvation revealed in the gospel will be more and more unfolded to his view. Thus he will learn with increasing simplicity to plead the name of Christ in genuine faith; to come to the Father by him, and to rely solely on his righteousness, redemption, and mediation, for acceptance and eternal life.

In this manner the practical student of scripture, being justified by faith, and having peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, will make still further progress in the divine life. The convincing and enlightening influences of the Holy

Spirit, through the instruction of the written word, will continually discover to him defects and defilements in his heart and conduct, which he had not before observed. Thus, while he presses forward, and aspires after nearer and nearer conformity to his perfect rule; repentance, faith, watchfulness, and fervent prayer, will become more and more habitual, and as it were natural to him. His heart will grow more humble, and his conscience more tender, his dependence on Christ more simple, and his gratitude for redeeming love more abundant, in proportion to the degree of his sanctification. These things will render him likewise more compassionate, tender, forbearing, and forgiving; more patient and self-denying; and more ready to encounter dangers and difficulties, in promoting the cause of Christ among his fellow-sinners. And, as no absolute perfection can be attained on earth; and as he deems all faulty and deformed, which does not come up to the requirement of the holy law, and the spotless example of the Saviour; so no limits can be assigned to his discoveries and progress, during his continuance in this world.

This is the character described by the apostle, "he is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the "work; and he shall be blessed in his *doing*." He is made wise unto salvation, and shall "abound "in hope by the power of the Holy Ghost:" he shall find liberty and pleasure in the ways of God; be made useful to society, and a blessing to his connections: and he shall "have an entrance ad- "ministered unto him abundantly into the ever- "lasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus "Christ."

No man who duly considers these things can doubt the practical nature and tendency of the gospel. Christ is our sole foundation: but no one builds on that foundation, except he "hears "his sayings and does them." The practical hearer's faith is living; he is a wise man: and this will appear to all the world, when the folly of those who build upon the sand by a dead faith, by hearing and not doing, will be exposed to universal contempt. Alas, my brethren, how numerous are such nominal Christians; "who call "Christ, Lord, yet do not the things that he says!" But, unless the design of the gospel be answered in our hearts and lives, the gospel itself will increase our condemnation.

Are any of you then sensible that your hearing has hitherto failed to influence your practice? Let me conjure you, by the love you bear to your own happiness, not to put off the alarming conviction, by saying, "Go thy way, at this time, "when I have a convenient opportunity I will call "for thee." It is not yet too late: "Now is the "accepted time, now is the day of salvation:" but you know not how soon the master of the house may "shut too the door;" and then it will be too late to begin to say, "Lord, Lord, open to "us;" for he will silence every plea, and bid you "depart as workers of iniquity."

But have you, my brethren, begun seriously to practise what you know, and to inquire the will of God that you may do it? Blessed be the Lord, for his grace bestowed on you! Go on in this way, my beloved brethren; and even the most humiliating discoveries you make of yourselves will

serve to endear the gospel of salvation to you. "Then shall you know, if you follow on to know "the Lord:" "For the path of the just shineth "more and more to the perfect day." The practice of duty will prepare your hearts for the reception of truth; by removing those prejudices with which the prevalence of carnal affections closes the understandings of the disobedient: and every accession of spiritual knowledge will have a sanctifying and comforting effect upon your hearts.

Finally, were we as desirous of having our souls adorned with holiness, as most persons are of decorating the poor dying body; we should certainly make continual discoveries of our remaining uncomeliness, and be thankful for assistance in such researches: and we should make daily progress in sanctification; by "putting off the old "man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful "lusts, and putting on the new man, which after "God is created in righteousness and true holi-"ness."

SERMON XIV.

1 CORINTHIANS XIII. 13.

And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.

The apostle, in this remarkable chapter, shews the Corinthians, that the most splendid and useful of those miraculous powers, which they emulously coveted and ostentatiously displayed, were far inferior in value to sanctifying grace: yea, that when united with the deepest knowledge of divine mysteries, the most self-denying liberality, and the most vehement zeal, they were nothing without charity; and did not so much as prove the possessor to be a real Christian of the lowest order. He then describes charity as a man would define gold, by its distinguishing properties, which are the same in a grain as in a ton; but the more a man possesses, and the less alloy is found in the mass, the richer he is.—And, having shewn that charity "would never fail," whereas miraculous powers would cease, and knowledge itself would be swallowed up and lost in the perfect light of heaven, he adds, "And now abideth faith, hope, "charity, these three; but the greatest of these is "charity."—It is evident that he meant to sum up, in these three radical graces, the grand essentials of vital Christianity, to which all other holy affections may be referred. But, as the word

charity is now used for one peculiar expression of love, which is equivocal, and may be counterfeit; it will render our discussion more perspicuous to substitute *love* in the place of it; it being well known that the original word is generally thus translated. I shall endeavour, therefore,

I. To consider separately the peculiar nature, exercise, and use of faith, hope, and love:

II. To shew in what respects love is the greatest of the three; and how this agrees with the doctrines of salvation by grace, and justification by faith alone.

The subject before us, my brethren, is of the greatest importance, and often fatally misunderstood. Let me then beg a peculiar measure of your attention; and let us lift up our hearts to God, beseeching him to "open our understand-"ings, that we may understand the scriptures," and be guided into the knowledge of his holy truth.

I. Let us consider separately the peculiar nature, exercise, and use of faith, hope, and love.

We begin with *faith*. That peculiar act of the understanding by which we avail ourselves of information, in those things which fall not under our own observation, and which do not admit of proof in a way of reasoning, is called *faith* or *believing*. If we credit testimony without sufficient grounds, we are unreasonably credulous: if we refuse to believe testimony which has sufficient grounds of credibility, we are unreasonably incredulous. It is therefore extremely absurd to oppose *reason* and *faith*, as if contrary to each other; when, in fact, faith is the use of reason in a

certain way, and in cases which confine us to that peculiar exercise of our rational powers. *Believing* may be distinguished from *reasoning*, and in some cases opposed to it: but, in opposing *faith* and *reason*, the friends of Christianity have given its enemies an advantage to which they are by no means entitled.

It is evident to all observing men, that the complicated machine of human society is moved, almost exclusively, by that very principle which numbers oppose and deride in speaking on religion. Testimony, received and credited, directs the determinations of princes and councils, of senates and military commanders, of tribunals and commercial companies, in their most important deliberations: and, did they refuse to act without self-evidence, demonstration, or personal knowledge, all their grand affairs must stagnate. But human testimony, though often fallacious, is deemed credible: they believe, decide, and carry their decisions into execution.—In the common concerns of life too, we believe a guide, a physician, a lawyer, and even those who provide our food; and the incredulous sceptic in such cases must be ruined, or starved, or perish by disease.

But, "if the testimony of man be great, the tes-"timony of God is greater." The scripture is the "sure testimony of God; making wise the sim-"ple."[1] It relates facts which God has attested; states docrines which he has immediately revealed; promises and assurances concerning the future, which he has engaged to accomplish; and com-

[1] 2 Tim. iii. 15—17.

mands and ordinances, which he has thus enforced with clearness and authority. All these things are intimately connected with our duty, safety, and felicity; they are made known for our warning, encouragement, and instruction: faith receives the information, and this excites and directs the believer's activity. We may *reason* soberly and humbly concerning the evidences of revelation, and the meaning of scripture: but, when these points have been ascertained, our reasonings are at an end; for either faith receives the testimony of God, or unbelief makes him a liar.

Faith, strictly speaking, is "the belief of *the* "*truth*;" with the application of it to ourselves, and a perception of its importance, holiness, excellency, and suitableness to our characters and circumstances. It is the gift and operation of God: for many of the truths, revealed in scripture, are so contrary to our pride, prejudices, and worldly lusts, that no evidence is sufficient to induce our cordial belief of them, till our minds have been prepared by preventing grace. "The natural man "receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; "for they are foolishness to him: neither can he "know them, because they are spiritually dis-"cerned."[1] True faith should therefore be sought by earnest prayer; and lively gratitude is due to God from those that do believe.

Faith appropriates the declarations of scripture respecting things past, present, and future; whether they appear dreadful or desirable. The believer credits the testimony of God concerning his

[1] 1 Cor. ii. 14.

own essential nature and perfections, and the righteousness of his law and government. In the same manner, he obtains information respecting the creation of the world, the entrance of sin and misery, the fall of man, the evil and desert of sin, the deceitfulness and wickedness of the human heart, the immortality of the soul, the resurrection of the body, the future judgment, and an eternal state of happiness or misery. Men may conjecture and dispute on these subjects; but faith, receiving the testimony of God with the teachableness of a child, satisfies the mind and influences the conduct, as if we saw the things believed. It is therefore impossible, *thus* to credit these doctrines, and not take warning to "flee from the wrath to come." Faith must, in this case, produce fear of threatened punishment: and, as it is always accompanied with some feeble discoveries of mercy, it will also in some degree soften and humble the heart to repentance, and excite earnest inquiries after salvation.

But we are especially called upon to believe the testimony of God concerning his Son. "This is "the record, that God hath given to us eternal "life, and this life is in his Son: he that hath the "Son hath life, and he that hath not the Son of "God hath not life." The numerous and decisive declarations of scripture on this subject have induced some persons to speak of faith, as exclusively meaning a reception of Christ for salvation: and no doubt this is the grand exercise and use of it. Yet in fact, unless we believe many other revealed truths with true humiliation of heart, we never can believe in the Son of God in a saving manner. We may assent to the doctrines of grace,

and abuse them; but we cannot understand their nature, glory, and suitableness to our case and circumstances.

True faith simply credits the divine record concerning the person of Emmanuel; his essential and eternal Deity, and his voluntary incarnation, that he might be our brother and surety, "God manifest in the flesh;" his obedience of infinite value, and the atoning sacrifice of his death upon the cross; his resurrection, ascension, and intercession in the presence of God for us; his several offices of Prophet, Priest, and King; and all the various particulars, concerning his power, truth, love, fulness of grace, mediatorial authority, and future coming to judgment. This belief cannot be separated from a cordial compliance with his invitations, a thankful reception of him in all his characters and offices, an habitual dependence on him for salvation, and a constant application for all the blessings procured for us by his sufferings and death. Thus we spiritually "eat his flesh and "drink his blood;" which are "meat indeed and "drink indeed:" and thus 'we feed on him in 'our hearts by faith with thanksgiving.'

"To you that believe he is precious." In proportion to our faith, Christ becomes to us the "pearl of great price;" and we grow more and more solicitous lest we should come short of him and his salvation. This renders us decided in renouncing other confidences, "counting all but loss "that we may win Christ, and be found in him;" diligently using all the means of grace, observing the directions given us, and making every sacrifice necessary for the securing of this main concern.

Joyful hope will animate us with most lively gratitude. Advancing knowledge and matured experience will render our dependence more simple; and, receiving continually from the fulness of Christ the supply of all our wants, he will become more and more glorious in our eyes and precious to our hearts: while increasing sanctification, and abundant diligence in the work of the Lord, will enhance our sense of obligation, without in the least deducting from our simplicity of reliance on him as our "wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemp-"tion."—"We are crucified with Christ: never-"theless we live; yet not we, but Christ liveth in "us: and the life that we live in the flesh we live "by the faith of the Son of God, who loved us and "gave himself for us." [1]

True faith has likewise respect to the "exceed-"ing great and precious promises" of scripture. These are sure testimonies of God ratified by all the engagements of the new covenant, in the blood of the great Mediator; and the promised blessings belong to all true believers, and to them exclusively, though they cannot always perceive their own title to them.

The doctrines and promises of scripture relate very much to the person, offices, and influences of the Holy Spirit. If then we truly believe these divine testimonies, with application to our own wants, and perceive the value of these life-giving, illuminating, sanctifying, and comforting influences; we shall certainly depend on them continually. Thus we shall *believe in* the Holy Ghost,

[1] Gal. ii. 20.

and honour him together with the Father and the Son, as the triune God of our salvation.

"Faith is" likewise "the evidence of things "not seen." It perceives the hand of God, and hears his voice, in all the varied events of providence; it realizes his holy, heart-searching, and gracious presence in all places; it penetrates invisible things; lays heaven and hell open to our view: contemplates the world of good and evil spirits with which we are surrounded; and looks forward to judgment and eternity, as just at hand. Thus, it supplies the want of sight and sense. "We "endure, as seeing him that is invisible." "We "look not at the things which are seen, but at the "things which are not seen." We set God before us in our daily conduct and conversation; we perceive his special presence with us in his sacred ordinances; we speak to him in prayer and praise; we hear his word of instruction and direction; we have "fellowship with the Father, and with his "Son Jesus Christ;" we "walk with God" *by faith;* we stand, we war, we run, we obey, and endure *by faith:* believing, we rely on God for strength, help, protection, support, and comfort according to his word; and thus are emboldened and enabled to face danger, resist temptation, renounce the world, bear the sharpest sufferings, and persevere in the hardest services, to which we can be called.[1]

It is evident that faith alone can answer these purposes; and that no other grace of Christianity, however excellent and necessary, can supply its

[1] Heb. xi.

place. Faith alone can appropriate the instructions of scripture; form our relation to Christ, that we may be "made the righteousness of God in "him:" seek supplies of every blessing from his fulness; rely on the faithfulness of God for the performance of his promises; supply the want of sight, and give nearness and certainty to invisible and eternal things.—But it is also evident that an assent to certain historical facts, or a system of inactive notions, or a groundless confidence of the divine favour, cannot be the faith of which such things are spoken. For this is a living and operative principle: it calls forth fear, hope, desire, aversion, love, gratitude and every other affection of the soul, into most vigorous and abiding exercise; and by their combined or varied energies overcomes the world, the flesh, and the devil, fights a good fight, and obtains a most honourable victory.

We proceed next to consider the peculiar nature, exercise and use of *hope*.

Hope is the expectation of future good, real or supposed. We may believe and expect what we dread and would escape: we may desire, what we despair of obtaining: but we hope for those things alone, which we desire and in some measure expect. In one form or other it is the chief solace of human life: no man is happy at present; but all hope for happiness, and pursue it according to their different notions. The hope and pursuit afford some pleasure, and keep the mind from preying on itself: but disappointment is certain to all who seek happiness in worldly things, whether

they be prosperous or unsuccessful.—There is also a religious hope, which is no less delusive, and even more certainly fatal; because the mistake is not discovered till it is too late to make a wiser choice. A warranted hope of happiness in the favour of our God is, however, secure from disappointment: and ensures present support and everlasting felicity.—The apostle exhorts us to "be ready always to give "an answer to every man that asketh us a reason "of the hope that is in us."[1] But while almost all we meet avow a hope of being saved, there are very few, that are able to give a solid reason for this hope: and if it be unreasonable it must be presumptuous. The sinner who warrantably hopes for everlasting felicity, and for various blessings in this present world, could assign such reasons as follow, for the hope that is in him; if he possessed the gift of utterance, and could orderly arrange his thoughts. 'The scriptures,' he would say, 'have 'been proved to be the word of God, and I am sa-'tisfied on that head. They reveal the just and 'holy God, as merciful and gracious, forgiving 'sin and saving sinners, through his beloved Son, 'whom he hath set forth to be a propitiatory sacrifice, 'and who "is able to save to the uttermost all 'them that come to God by him, seeing he ever 'liveth to make intercession for them." This di-'vine Saviour invites all that will come to him, and 'adds, "Him that cometh unto me, I will in no 'wise cast out." I know myself to be a vile sin-'ner, and I repent in dust and ashes. I am con-'scious that I renounce all other pleas, own the

[1] 1 Pet. iii. 15, 16.

'justice of God in my condemnation, and sue only 'for mercy through Emmanuel's blood; "My 'soul longeth for God's salvation, and I hope in 'his word;" I desire to be made willing to part 'with all for Christ; and I pray for true faith, and 'stronger faith. I perceive something of the 'nature and glory of God's way of saving sinners, 'and I approve of it as worthy of him and suitable 'to men; and I long to see and admire the dis-'plays of his glory more and more. I trust I have 'experienced in some degree that change of heart, 'that new creation, which the scriptures describe 'as accompanying salvation. My desires, conflicts, 'fears, sorrows, comforts, and state of mind coin-'cide with what I read in the word of God con-'cerning his believing people in former ages. I 'trust I do feel some measure of contrition, re-'verence, and love of God, love of Christ and his 'people, and other affections, to which I once was 'wholly a stranger; and it is my grief and burden, 'that I feel them no more, and am harassed by so 'many things contrary to the best desires of my 'heart. I long to serve the Lord with fervent 'zeal: "I delight in the law of God after the in-'ward man: but I feel another law,—warring 'against this law of my mind. I cannot do the 'things that I would:" and were it not for the 'mercy and grace of the Lord Jesus, this would 'make me most completely wretched. But I trust 'I do believe in him, and am interested in the 'promises made by him: thus I wait for increas-'ing sanctification; and at length expect perfect 'holiness and happiness according to that ever-'lasting covenant, which God hath "confirmed

'with an oath, that we might have a strong con-
'solation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold on
'the hope set before us."[1]

Thus the believer can "give a reason for his "hope." In general the word of God encourages the sinner to hope for mercy and grace: and in particular the work of the Holy Spirit on the believer's heart "seals him to the day of redemp-"tion," and gives him a special warrant to expect the performance of all the promises of God to his soul. It is the earnest, the first fruits, the pledge of glory; it is renovation to the divine image; and, while the believer feels filial affections towards his reconciled Father, "the Spirit of adoption wit-"nesseth with his spirit, that he is a child, and "an heir, of God through Jesus Christ." In proportion as a man has a right judgment in these matters, and consciously experiences these influences of the Holy Spirit, and has grace in lively exercise; his hope rises to full assurance: but misapprehension, weakness of faith, sloth, temptation, and quenching or grieving the Spirit, darken his evidence and weaken his confidence. This "good hope through grace is obtained" and preserved by holy diligence."[2] But presumption of any kind may be acquired and maintained by the slothful. The former prevails most upon strict scriptural examination, and is cleared up by an increase of spiritual knowledge: but the latter cannot endure close investigation; and would be destroyed by discoveries of the divine holiness, the excellency of the commandment, the evil of

[1] Heb. vi. 16—20. [2] Heb. vi. 11. 2 Pet. i. 10.

sin, and the real nature and tendency of the gospel. Genuine hope has many variations; it rises and sinks, like the mercury in the barometer: now it prevails and triumphs, and now it is shaken; and the possessor, not doubting either the power, truth, or love of Christ, is led to question whether he be a true believer, when he has been drawn into unsuitable tempers and conduct. But presumption is unfeeling: it resembles more the case of death, than that of health; and therefore is generally invariable.

The true hope is living and active. "Every "man, that hath this hope in him, purifieth him-"self as the Lord is pure." In proportion as it abounds, a man feels himself animated for every duty; and it is connected with the exercise of all other graces. "Hope maketh not ashamed, be-"cause the love of God is shed abroad in the heart "by the Holy Ghost." But the hypocrite's hope is solitary and inactive: instead of stimulating him to exertion, it soothes him into indolence and self-indulgence, and he cannot be excited to diligence unless affrighted with the dread of hell. His confidence is a vain expectation of safety and happiness, by a presumptuous reliance on the promises, without a cordial obedience to the gospel, and acceptance of its salvation.

The living hope of a Christian "is the anchor of "the soul, both sure and stedfast." The anchor is intended to retain the vessel in its station, notwithstanding tides, currents, and tempests; and it is useful generally to prevent it from driving, and running foul of other ships, on the strand, and on rocks or quicksands. In like manner we have a

station to fill up: the fluctuating tides of fashion, opinion, and false doctrines; the temptations of Satan and his agents, the frowns of the world, and trials of various kinds; tend to drive us from it, to hurry us into some ruinous conduct, or within the reach of some tremendous whirlpool. But the hope of eternal happiness, and of all things needful for life and godliness, according to the express promises of God; with the cheering earnest and anticipation of these inestimable benefits, and the fear of coming short of them, keep us stedfast in our place, and to our duty. Thus we are animated to renounce present advantages, to endure hardships, to resist temptations, to face persecutors, and "to cleave to the Lord with full purpose of "heart:" even as the soldier, the mariner, and the merchant are emboldened and excited to patience and perseverance, by the hope of the desired compensation of their peculiar dangers and fatigues: for despair of success would in all these cases damp men's ardour and enervate their endeavours.—This hope is peculiarly necessary in seasons of urgent danger or severe persecution, that the Christian may be rendered "stedfast, unmovable, "always abounding in the work of the Lord; "knowing that his labour is not in vain in the "Lord." The sacred writers therefore exhort believers to "hope unto the end;" and bestow much pains to exhibit the variety, excellency, and glory of the promised blessings, in the most striking and affecting manner. "Rejoice," says our Lord, "and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward "in heaven." "Our light affliction, which is but "for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceed-

" ing and eternal weight of glory." " Blessed be " the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, " who hath begotten us again to a lively hope; " to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, " and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven " for you."[1] " We are saved by hope, but hope " that is seen is not hope; for what a man seeth " why doth he yet hope for? But, if we hope for " what we see not, then do we with patience wait " for it."[2] " God, who hath given us everlasting " consolation and good hope through grace, com- " fort your hearts, and stablish you in every good " word and work."[3] " Now the God of hope fill " you with all peace and joy in believing, that ye " may abound in hope by the power of the Holy " Ghost."[4]

These and many other scriptures shew the importance of lively and abounding hope, in the Christian warfare. By faith we discern the promised good afar off; in fervent desire we embrace it; and in hope, resting on the word and perfections of God, we patiently wait for it, amidst discouragements, delays, conflicts, difficulties, and sufferings; for " it is good to hope, and quietly " wait for the salvation of the Lord."—This hope is frequently called *trusting in God*, or *trusting in Christ*; and it implies that steady reliance on his power, truth, wisdom and mercy, which takes the soul off from trusting in men or creatures, and rescues it from all self-confidence. Expecting happiness from God alone, according to his word,

[1] Matt. v. 12. 2 Cor. iv. 17. 1 Pet. i. 3—8.
[2] Rom. viii. 24, 25. [3] 2 Thess. ii. 16, 17.
[4] Rom. xv. 13.

e believer parts with or refuses present things, in pectation of better blessings in reversion; and its the Lord's time for them, seeks them in his y, and prepares for the enjoyment of them by lowing after holiness, and abounding in every od work. He knows that no feeble attempt or ended good work shall lose its reward, however successful, or ill requited among men: this proces "the patience of hope," and is connected th submission, contentment, and cheerful perverance in well doing; while the believer "seeks for glory, honour, and immortality:" even as e Lord Jesus, "for the joy set before him, endured the cross, and despised the shame." It is erefore called "the helmet of salvation," and the breast-plate of hope:" for without it we are capable of fighting the good fight of faith: and e uniformly find that, in proportion as genuine pe prevails, we are prepared to wrestle, labour, endure hardship; and, when greatly discouraged, e are heartless in every undertaking, and unfit r every service.

From first to last of our Christian course, hope ust be as the anchor, the helmet, and the breastate of our souls. How firmly soever we believe e doctrines of revelation: yet, unless we have a rranted and holy expectation of obtaining the rious blessings proposed to us, we shall go on ebly, even in smooth and prosperous scenes; d we should faint in times of difficulty. The ore assured this true hope is, the greater will be r constancy and diligence in the ways of God: d, while the presumptuous hope of the hypocrite inefficacious and useless, often failing in life,

and certainly expiring at death; the hope that hath been described, "is sure and stedfast:" it lays hold of the unfailing word of God; it is maintained by supplies of the Spirit of Christ, and encouraged by constant experience; and it will abide in its principle and exercise, till it is swallowed up in the enjoyment of heavenly felicity.

We now proceed to consider the peculiar nature, use, and exercise of *love*.

The apostle indeed in the chapter before us speaks principally of love to mankind; yet we cannot suppose that he meant to exclude the love of God: but he considered the Christian's love to his brethren "whom he had seen," as the most unequivocal evidence of his love to God "whom "he had not seen."[1] The whole scripture, however, authorizes, and requires us to speak fully upon this subject: and surely no rational man, acquainted with the sacred oracles, will maintain that acts of benevolence, without regard to God, and separate from genuine faith and hope, is that love on which the apostle bestows such high encomiums. No doubt this abides in the heart and in the church, united with faith and hope, and is inseparable from them.—The holy law requires us "to love God with all our heart, and mind, and "soul, and strength;" and this is "written in the "inward parts" of the redeemed sinner, by the renewal of the Holy Spirit. He thus learns supremely to love, admire, and adore the glorious excellences of God; to seek his happiness in him; to thirst after him or rejoice in him above all

[1] 1 John iv. 20, 21.

other things: to feel lively gratitude for his boundless mercies; to devote himself willingly to his service; to manifest an ardent zeal for his glory, lively joy when his name is honoured, and poignant grief when impiety and iniquity triumph; and fervently to pray, "Hallowed be thy name, thy "kingdom come, thy will be done in earth as in "heaven."

This love to God is particularly expressed in fervent affection to the Lord Jesus, "the bright-"ness of his glory, and the express image of his "person." Through him sinners know, approach, trust, worship, and serve a God of infinite justice and holiness: and in his person and redemption the harmonious glory of all the perfections of the Godhead is displayed, more than in all his other works. It is indeed very remarkable, that every kind and degree of love, which JEHOVAH claims by his holy law, is demanded for the Lord Jesus by his apostles and evangelists. So that, in supremely loving Christ, desiring, rejoicing, and glorying in him; thanking, praising, and adoring him; magnifying him in our bodies, whether by life or death; being "purified *unto him* a peculiar people, zealous of good works;" honouring and obeying him unreservedly; we evidently obey, honour, and love the Father, according to the requirements of his holy word. And this demonstrates that "He and the Father are One," in the strictest sense imaginable.

The immense obligations, which redeemed sinners have received from the divine Saviour, render this love to him peculiarly reasonable and delight-

ful: yet it is not merely gratitude, or lively emotions of the animal passions. It is a rational choice of the Lord as our portion and salvation; an admiring love of every display of his perfections; and a disposition to delight in doing his will, and promoting the manifestation of his glory among men. It is therefore the spring and first mover in all spiritual worship and obedience, as well as the principal duty required from us. "This is the "love of God, that we keep his commandments; "and his commandments are not grievous." Under every dispensation, and in all possible circumstances, on earth, or in heaven, this must be the essence of true religion: and all external services are no further acceptable than as they spring from love. Even the *fear*, which differs from profound reverence of that infinite excellency which we supremely love, though in the present state useful, yet diminishes as love gathers strength, and will cease when love shall be perfected.

This holy affection to our glorious Creator, Benefactor, and Saviour, must be shewn by love to our neighbours and brethren. "Thou shalt love "thy neighbour as thyself." These words briefly comprehend the whole law of God in this respect and our Lord's parable, or narrative, of the good Samaritan hath taught us, that every human being, whatever be his nation or religion, and however he may have acted towards us, is our *neighbour*; entitled to our cordial good-will, and our kind offices, when within our reach and in need of our assistance. He himself hath far exceeded the kindness of the good Samaritan, in assuming our nature, and

saving us rebels and enemies by his suffering and death upon the cross: and in both respects he hath said to us, "Go and do likewise."

"Love worketh no ill to his neighbour." This commandment therefore, if universally obeyed, would preclude all kinds and degrees of fraud, injustice, oppression, slander, and every other word and action, in the least injurious to any human being; yea, all hard thoughts and ill wishes, suspicion, resentment, envy, coveting, or selfishness. On the other hand love seeks the benefit of its object, and rejoices in its happiness: if then we love our neighbour as we ought, we shall desire to promote his good in every respect, by all suitable means in our power. In proportion as our "love abounds," we shall be ready to deny ourselves, to labour and to incur expense in contributing to his advantage. If we really love our neighbour as we *ought to love ourselves*, we shall seek his highest good in the first place, and aim to render all our kind endeavours subservient to his everlasting welfare. His happiness is of equal value with our own; his soul, life, ease, peace, and reputation, are as important as our's. We ought therefore to seek his good sincerely and earnestly; and to give up inferior interests and endure inferior sufferings, when we can thus preserve him from heavier distress, or procure for him superior blessings: provided it can be done consistently with the duties of our several relations in life.—We should love what is amiable, respect what is honourable, praise what is commendable, excuse what is excuseable, bear with and forgive what is faulty, and put the best construction on what is

doubtful, in our neighbour's conduct; and commiserate and relieve his distresses: exactly as we would that others should do to us in similar circumstances.

We are indeed more immediately entrusted by the Lord with the care of our own lives and souls; and required to provide especially for our children and near relatives: and, in ordinary cases, we may not be able to shew active love beyond our own very contracted circle. But universal benevolence will dictate prayers for all men: and on particular occasions we are required to exercise self-denial, and in a measure suspend our kindness to those near to us, that we may avail ourselves of an opportunity to relieve and serve those who are more remote from us.

This love of our neighbour is enforced under the gospel by other motives, and admits of other modifications, than are expressly mentioned in the law. Our peculiar relation and obligations to Christ require us to love his people, as our brethren, in an especial manner. "A new commandment," says he, "I give unto you, that ye love one another, "as I have loved you."[1] And St. John says, it is "the old commandment which was from the "beginning," and yet a "new commandment:"[2] that is, the old command enforced by new motives and a recent example, and for other ends than formerly. They, whom we judge to be true believers, are entitled to our most endeared affection, most cordial complacency, tender sympathy and self-denying liberal assistance. "Forasmuch as ye

[1] John xiii. 34, 35. xv. 12. [2] 1 John ii. 7—11.

it to the least of these my brethren, ye did ıto me." They should be our chosen com- ıs, our bosom-friends, and dearer to us than ırthly relative; as our brethren in Christ, ıjects of his special love, bearing his image, ed to his service, and fellow heirs of heavenly y. We should labour, "to keep the unity he Spirit in the bond of peace;" to preserve ny among "all that love the Lord Jesus incerity," however divided by external dis- ns; to cast the mantle of love over their ities, and to shew an habitual disposition to ate peace with them, and do them good. eby we know that we are passed from death o life, because we love the brethren:" for we w especially attached to the very persons, we were naturally disposed to despise and e.—Alas, that this peculiar mark of Christ's isciples should be so little conspicuous in his church!

conscientious regulation of all our relative ons, and a performance of the duties result- om them, are next required of us: and, when are attended to from evangelical principles, ccording to the precepts of Christ, they are from interfering with our love to God and r neighbour, that they constitute an im- ıt part of our obedience. Love to particular s, and gratitude to benefactors should be so ised as to coincide with our general duty: essive attachments, as generally understood elebrated, are partial, exclusive, and idola- affections, the love of a man's own image in er person, self-love reflected, or the creature

substituted in the place of the Creator. Love of our country likewise, while it consists with love to mankind at large, is love to our neighbour according to the degree of proximity, and may be expressed in seeking the real good of our own nation by every fair and equitable endeavour. But Roman and Grecian patriotism is downright selfishness; a bigotry in benevolence, instead of philanthropy. It is good-will to a few, foolishly seeking their prejudicial aggrandizement, at the expense of the ruin or misery of all the world besides. It is therefore the honour of Christianity that it makes no mention of so proud, rapacious, and malignant a disposition.

Love to our neighbours as ourselves is also shewn by benevolence and compassion for men of no religion, of false religions, or even of the vilest characters. It forbids us to do them any injury, or to persecute them for their sentiments or practices; or any way to molest them, except as they become obnoxious to punishment for disturbing the peace of the community. We must not needlessly propagate reports to their disadvantage, even if true; much less may we slander and misrepresent them. We ought to watch opportunities of doing them good, and conciliating them by kind usage; not disdaining, or despairing of, them; but praying and hoping that they may be converted from the evil of their ways, and saved from destruction. And this consists very well with separating from their company, "not bidding them God speed, "lest we partake of their evil deeds;" and all other protests, which we are commanded to enter against their prineiples and conduct.

We are even required to love our most virulent and injurious enemies and persecutors; after the example of the Lord's love to us, when rebels against him. Not that we ought to love them more than our friends and brethren; as some have misinterpreted these precepts, that they might expose them to contempt. But we should still bear good-will to our foes, wish them well and pray for them, watch against all resentment, and not suffer ourselves to be overcome with evil, but still strive to overcome evil with good. We ought to keep our hearts diligently, that we may not rejoice either in their crimes, disgrace, or misery; to cultivate compassion for them, especially in respect of their souls: to shew a forbearing, forgiving, and reconcileable disposition; to spare no pains, and grudge no expense or self-denial, in attempting to do them good; and to seize on every opportunity of relieving their temporal distresses, in order to make way for seeking their more important advantage. "If thine enemy hunger, feed him; "if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing "thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head." In these cases we should be ready to relieve the most wicked and ungrateful; but in ordinary circumstances our brethren and friends have a prior claim to our special kindness; even as our heavenly Father causes "his sun to shine and his rain to de-"scend on the wicked and ungrateful," but reserves his peculiar blessings for his children.

The example of the Lord's love to us when enemies, every part of the plan of redemption, the ministry of reconciliation, and the past and present kindness of our God to his believing servants

furnish motives and arguments for the constant practice of all those loving dispositions, and that peaceable and affectionate conduct, which are indispensably required of Christ's disciples, as the only sure evidences that they are true believers, and that "their sins are forgiven for his name's sake."

Let us compare these things with the apostle's description of love, as stated in the context. "Love," says he, "suffereth long and is kind: "love envieth not: love vaunteth not itself; is "not puffed up; does not behave itself unseemly; "seeketh not her own; is not easily provoked; "thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but "rejoiceth in the truth: beareth all things, be-"lieveth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all "things." St. Paul doubtless spake of love to men for the Lord's sake; love expressed both by doing and suffering: love to both their bodies and souls: a patient, long-suffering, unostentatious, disinterested, prudent, modest, unsuspicious, condescending, self-denying, forgiving, and fervent affection to our neighbours and brethren; expressed in the persevering use of every means suited to do them good; and unwearied, by suffering or ill-usage, in seeking to accomplish this benevolent and compassionate object. Next to the example of Christ, the conduct of the apostle himself forms undoubtedly the best exposition of his language, that was ever yet given.

II. Then we proceed very briefly to shew, in what respects love is greater than faith and hope; and how this consists with the doctrine of salvation by grace, justification by faith alone.

Love is greater than faith and hope, because it

constitutes the end for which faith and hope are appointed and rendered effectual. "The end of "the commandment," or of the message of the gospel, "is love, out of a pure heart, and of a good "conscience, and of faith unfeigned."[1] It is the design of the whole gospel to recover men from a state of apostacy, enmity, selfishness, and malignity, to that love of God and man which the law commands; and to induce them, by obligations of inestimable value, and by new principles implanted in the heart, to express that love in all their tempers and conduct. This salvation, through the blood of Christ, can only be perceived and applied by *faith:* and the completion of it is the object of *hope:* but *love* is the disposition, health, and felicity, to which man must be restored, in connexion with forgiveness of sin and reconciliation to God. It is the prize itself, of which faith and hope must gradually put us in possession. In proportion as we love, we "dwell in God, and God in us;" we anticipate heaven, and possess the blessing: for "God is love," and heaven is love. A magnificent edifice cannot be erected without scaffolding; yet the building is greater than the scaffolding, being the sole end for which that is necessary: and when it is finished the scaffolding is removed as an useless encumbrance.

Love will endure for ever; but faith and hope will soon be swallowed up in sight and enjoyment. In heaven they will be no longer wanted: but love will there be perfected; and every alloy of envy selfishness, prejudice, or aversion removed; every

[1] 1 Tim. i. 5.

uneasy, self-denying exercise changed for such as are most delightful; and all coldness and deficiency remedied. The blessed inhabitants will love God with their whole souls, and each other as themselves; and the felicity of every individual will increase the joy of all the rest. Love must therefore be greater than faith and hope, because more excellent in its nature, and more enduring in its use. Faith and hope are only necessary in this introductory scene; though honourable to God and profitable to us in the highest degree: but the former will flourish for ever, the business, element, joy, and glory of heaven itself; uniting God and all holy creatures in the most perfect harmony and felicity."[1]

Yet love cannot perform the functions of faith or hope, any more than the eye can perform the office of the ear, or the hand that of the foot. However excellent, it can do nothing towards justifying a sinner. The little measure of it, to which we here attain, can neither reverse the curse of the broken law, nor form our bond of union with Christ, that we may be justified in that "righte-"ousness of God, which is unto all, and upon all "that believe." Even were our love perfected, previous to justification, it could not atone for past sins, or merit everlasting life: but in fact it is the fruit of the Spirit of Christ, and the seal of our gratuitous justification. The instructions of scripture concerning love, when duly considered, prove our need of this free salvation; and the measure of it to which we are restored is a part of that sal-

[1] Col. iii. 14.

vation, and an earnest and evidence of the whole. It is therefore very obvious to see, that love is greater than faith or hope; that "we are," nevertheless, "saved by grace through faith;" and that "he who believeth shall be saved, and he who "believeth not shall be damned."

My brethren, let us learn from this important subject not to oppose one part of scripture to another, as many fatally do. That apparent love which does not spring from faith, and is not accompanied by repentance, humility, hope, patience, and other holy dispositions, is a counterfeit: and so is the faith that does not work by love, and the hope which does not purify the heart. That love to our neighbour, which is not the result of love to Christ is not the love which the sacred writers extol: nor can we love the bodies of men aright, if we neglect their souls; or regard their souls, if we do not relieve their temporal wants as we have opportunity and ability.

While we hold fast the principles of the gospel, let us beware of barren notions, spiritual pride, and a vain glorious use of our endowments. These may be splendid in the judgment of man: but they are nothing, and worse than nothing, in the sight of God. A bitter, boasting, and censorious zeal characterizes "the wisdom that is from be-"neath; and which is earthly, sensual and de-"vilish:" not that "which is from above, and is "first pure, then peaceable, gentle, easy to be "intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without "partiality, and without hypocrisy."[1]—Let us then,

[1] James iii. 13—18.

my brethren, "follow after love:" but let us see to it that it be the genuine affection, the nature and effects of which the scripture describes, and which connects the various parts of Christianity into one consistent whole.

We may likewise observe that the least degree of those holy tempers, which are common to believers, is inconceivably more valuable to the possessor, than those shining gifts and accomplishments, by which some are distinguished, but which may exist without living faith. Such were the gifts of tongues and prophecy, miraculous powers, or apostolical authority, which might exist apart from saving grace: and such are learning, genius, eloquence, and other admired endowments, which men covet, envy, or ostentatiously display.

But, next to the possession of that holiness which inseparably accompanies salvation, we should desire and seek such gifts as may qualify us for the duties of our several stations: and we should pray earnestly, that "our love may abound yet more and "more in knowledge and in all judgment; that "we may approve things that are excellent; that "we may be sincere and without offence, till the "day of Christ; being filled with the fruits of "righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ to the "praise and glory of God."[1]

[1] Phil. i. 9—11.

SERMON XV.[1]

LUKE II. 13, 14.

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will toward men.

ST. Paul, having said, "Without controversy, 'great is the mystery of godliness, God was ma-'nifest in the flesh;" adds among other things, hat he "was seen of angels." These heavenly vorshippers saw the Lord of glory, their Creator nd Sovereign, clothed with human flesh, and laid s an infant in a manger; they saw him tempted y the devil in the wilderness, and ministered to im when he had overcome the enemy; they were pectators of his transfiguration on the mount, nd of his agony in the garden; they beheld him xpire on the cross; they attended his glorious esurrection and ascension; and, when he was ex-lted in human nature to the mediatorial throne, hey did him homage, and joined the redeemed in inging, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to 'receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and 'strength, and honour, and glory, and bless-'ing."[2] For when the Father "bringeth in the

[1] Preached on Christmas Day, 1795.

[2] Rev. v. 9—14.

" first begotten into the world, he saith, And let " all the angels of God worship him."[1] Finally they will be attendant and ministering servants, when Christ shall come to raise the dead and judge the world.

In taking occasion from the present festival to discourse on a subject with which we should be conversant at every season of the year, I shall,

I. Make some remarks on the event celebrated by the heavenly host:

II. Explain their song of exalted praise and adoration:

III. Endeavour to bring the matter home to ourselves by some practical deductions.

And may the Lord himself direct and bless our meditations; that we may be animated and assisted, in " keeping a day unto the Lord," after a holy and heavenly manner; and not in conformity with the corrupt and carnal fashion of those who turn a Christian solemnity into a bacchanalian carnival!

I. Let us reflect on the event which was celebrated by the heavenly host.

A poor woman named Mary, of the family of David, espoused to a carpenter residing at Nazareth, a place branded with infamy, came with her husband to Bethlehem, in obedience to a decree of Cæsar Augustus: and, there being " no room " for them in the inn," which was occupied by superior people, they were lodged in a stable. In this situation Mary was delivered of a son, whom she " wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a

[1] Heb. i. 6.

"manger."—Nothing at first sight appears remarkable in this event, except the extremely mean and inconvenient accommodation made for the poor woman and her infant; and the unfeeling neglect shewn to a person in her circumstances by the inhabitants of Bethlehem. Indeed the affair seems scarcely to have been noticed in that city: and we do not find that it was heard of at Jerusalem, till the child was presented at the temple according to the law of Moses; when a few persons of eminent piety were made acquainted with it. The rulers, scribes, and priests in general knew nothing of these transactions, till wise men from the east came to inquire after the new-born King, and to do him homage. Then indeed a considerable degree of attention was excited; and the tyrant Herod caused the infants about Bethlehem to be cruelly murdered, in hopes of destroying one whom he dreaded as the rival of his authority. Soon after, however, the report seems to have been forgotten. The child born at Bethlehem was brought up at Nazareth with Joseph the carpenter, and doubtless earned his bread at that laborious trade; till at length he entered on his public ministry, which he closed by an ignominious death upon a cross. Thus "he grew up "before the Lord as a tender plant, and as a root "out of a dry ground; he had no form or comeliness; and, when the people saw him, there "was no beauty that they should desire him: he "was despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief."[1] And, if the

[1] Isa. liii. 2, 3.

Jews knew little of the infant at Bethlehem, and the carpenter's son at Nazareth; the gentile rulers, conquerors, and philosophers were entirely unacquainted with him. All over the earth, which he came to bless, he was disregarded or despised: yet angels witnessed and celebrated his birth with admiring songs of praise!

These blessed spirits, free from guilt and perfect in holiness, want not a Saviour. "They excel in "strength, and do the Lord's commandments, "hearkening to the voice of his words."[1] Their capacities for wisdom and understanding are very great; their judgment and taste for what is beautiful and glorious are exactly conformable to those of the holy God whom they adore; and the hope of being at length made like them, and equal to them, should excite a noble ambition and emulation in every human heart. But the event which had taken place at Bethlehem, and which we this day commemorate, appeared to them of the greatest possible importance, and worthy to be celebrated with their most rapturous adorations.

In the infant laid in a manger they recognized the "seed of the woman," the spotless offspring of a virgin-mother, who was to come and "bruise "the serpent's head:" and "the seed of Abraham, "in whom all nations should be blessed." They knew that Mary was come to Bethlehem according to the purpose of God, that the ancient prophecy might be fulfilled: "But thou, Bethlehem-Ephra-"tah, though thou be little among the thousands "of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth

[1] Psal. ciii. 20.

" unto me, that is to be ruler in Israel; whose " goings forth have been from of old, from ever- " lasting."[1] They saw " the Desire of all nations " actually come;[2] and they celebrated the accomplishment of Isaiah's prediction, " Unto us a Child " is born, unto us a Son is given; and the govern- " ment shall be upon his shoulder; and his name " shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The " mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince " of Peace."[3] One of the company therefore said to the poor shepherds, " Fear not, for behold I " bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall " be to all people: for unto you is born this day, " in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ, " the Lord." They could not say, " *Unto us* a " Child is born, *unto us* a Son is given:" " for " verily he took not on him the nature of angels, " but he took on him the seed of Abraham."[4] He came into the world to be a Saviour: he was the Christ, the promised Messiah, the anointed Prophet, Priest, and King; yea, he was " The LORD:" " The second man is the LORD from heaven." " His name is Emmanuel:" for " God is in Christ " reconciling the world unto himself."

" The WORD, who was in the beginning with " God, and who was God, by whom all things " were made, and without whom was not any " thing made that was made," was now " made " flesh and dwelt among us;" and angels first beheld " his glory, the glory as of the only-be-

[1] Mic. v. 2.
[2] Hag. ii. 7.
[3] Isa. ix. 6.
[4] Heb. ii. 14—16.

that we disregard the important interests of eternity!

In considering the hymn of praise before us, we may perhaps begin to best advantage with the concluding sentence, "Good will to men."—The blessed angels had witnessed the creation of the earth, when these "morning-stars sang together, "and all the sons of God shouted for joy;"[1] for in that august transaction they saw the immensity of their Creator's power, wisdom, and goodness. With astonishment and awe they beheld also the fall of their compeers; and, when "God spared not "the angels that sinned, but cast them down to "hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness "to be reserved unto judgment,"[2] they adored his righteous severity against the rebellious, and his holy abhorrence of sin; and they received instruction of inestimable value from the impressive solemn scene. They saw too the fall of man: and probably expected that vengeance would, with unabated vehemence, seize in like manner upon him; not conceiving that a God of infinite purity and justice could possibly shew mercy and kindness to rebels and apostates. No doubt they heard the first intimation of favour to our offending parents, mixed with the solemn denunciation of death and all the woes that preceded it: and this must have excited a peculiar attention to so new and interesting a discovery of the divine perfections.

From that crisis they had been witnesses and messengers, both of the Lord's mercy and of his indignation, towards the human race. Numerous

[1] Job xxxviii. 7. [2] 2 Pet. ii. 4.

opportunities had been afforded them, in the history of mankind, of learning the fatal effects of transgression, and the power of the divine wrath. The deluge; the tremendous doom of Sodom and Gomorrah; the desolations of Egypt; the severities inflicted on the devoted Canaanites; the judgments executed even on offending Israel, in the wilderness and in Canaan, and by the Babylonish captivity; were so many illustrations of the justice of God, and of his holy abhorrence of iniquity. But at the same time his patience and bounty towards sinful men, his gracious interpositions in behalf of his people, the intimations and predictions of a Saviour, the promises given to believers, and the actual salvation of numbers, shewed his "good-"will" to mankind; and his readiness to pity, help, and relieve them, as far as could consist with the honour of his name, and the interests of his universal and everlasting kingdom.

Yet in the infant lying in the manger at Bethlehem the angels had such a discovery of the Lord's "good-will to men," connected with his detestation of their sins, as had never hitherto attracted their notice or raised their expectations. They no doubt, before this, had some general conception of the plan formed by infinite wisdom and everlasting love: perhaps the whole had been fully notified to them. Yet, when the stupendous design was thus far accomplished, their previous admiration of the ineffable condescension, compassion, and love of the holy and glorious Lord God towards lost sinners, whose multiplied and heinous crimes had so long called loudly for vengeance, was far exceeded, and as it were swallowed up in inexpressible asto-

nishment. Good-will to man! to guilty, polluted, ungrateful man! to idolatrous, impious, and blaspheming man! This overwhelmed the blessed angels with amazement, and tuned their hearts to adoring praise. And these reflections must have the same effect on all, who have just views of the majesty and glorious holiness of God, the nature and desert of sin, and the wonderful plan of redemption. "God commendeth his love to us, in "that while we were yet sinners Christ died for "us." "Herein is love, not that we loved God, "but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the "propitiation for our sins."[1]

This good-will of God to men is mere compassion and benevolence, not approbation or complacency. The crimes, dispositions, and characters of the creatures, thus beloved, were unspeakably hateful in his holy eyes: and none of his protestations against sin are so decided and energetic, as that which principally declares his love to sinners. The compassion and tenderness, which induce virtuous and pious persons, at great expense, to relieve those pitiable objects whose crimes have rendered them miserable; in order that an attempt may be made to rescue them from temporal and eternal ruin; form a very distant imitation of the love shewn by our God to sinners, in giving his Son to be their Saviour, even while he declares them to be deserving of his everlasting wrath and abhorrence. The heinousness of our crimes, the contrariety of our dispositions, to the divine purity, the great things he hath done to make way for

[1] Rom. v. 6—10. 1 John iv. 10.

our salvation, and the inestimable blessings prepared for us, combine to illustrate the riches of God's mercy and the immensity of his goodness. The love of the Father in giving his only-begotten and well-beloved Son; the love of the Son in most willingly assuming our nature, that he might give himself a sacrifice for our sins; and the love of the Spirit in preparing our hearts to receive this salvation, and in making us meet for the heavenly inheritance; demand our warmest gratitude and most fervent praises; while we give 'glory to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy 'Spirit,' into whose name we were baptized.

Before the coming of Christ, the special tokens of the Lord's good-will to men were principally confined to the people of Israel; and he had "suf- "fered all other nations to walk in their own "ways." But in the child born at Bethlehem the angels saw him who was appointed for "salvation "to the ends of the earth." The partition-wall was about to be removed; the good tidings of a Saviour, even "Christ the Lord," were speedily to be proclaimed to all people without distinction; and thus a proposal of mercy and every blessing, "without money and without price," would be made to persons of all characters and descriptions, not excepting the vilest. Nay, "all men every "where would be commanded to repent:" and the ambassadors of Christ would, in his stead, and as if God besought them by their mouth, "beseech "them to be reconciled to God." The fullest assurances were thus about to be given that the loving Saviour would reject none, on any account whatever, who came to him for "life and godli-

"ness;" and "exceedingly great and precious "promises," together with the institution of sacred ordinances as 'means of grace,' would concur in encouraging sinners of every nation to seek the blessings of eternal life, without fearing a denial or disappointment.—All this doubtless and far more was perceived by the heavenly host, when they proclaimed "Good-will to men," in celebrating the nativity of our Emmanuel!

They sang also "Peace on earth." They had witnessed the fatal effects of the creature's venturing to oppose the Creator's will, and become his enemies. They had seen angels, as it were, declare war against the Almighty; and, even when cast out of heaven, employing all their liberty in carrying on the same desperate and ruinous hostilities. They beheld men seduced to join the apostate rebels, and become "enemies to God by "wicked works;" and then instigated by enmity to increasing iniquity. The earth filled with tears, groans, and miseries; the universal victory and triumph of death and the grave; and the subsequent doom of impenitent and unreconciled sinners; were the consequences which angels had witnessed of man's infatuated contest against his omnipotent Creator.—They had been spectators likewise of all the cruel wars, which men in every age had waged against each other; and of all the dire effects of ambition, envy, revenge, and insatiable rapacity or cruelty, from the day when Cain, the first murderer, embrued his hands in his brother's blood. What then must have been the sentiments and feelings of these benevolent spirits, while wit-

nessing the murders, massacres, battles, sieges, and persecutions, which have wasted the human species, and increased the miseries of the world to a degree that exceeds all calculation? What did they think of the lavish encomiums bestowed, almost unanimously, on the most skilful, prosperous, and unfeeling of these butchers of mankind? What estimate did they form of man's heart, and of the vaunted dignity of human nature, of 'the milk of human kindness,' and of the sufficiency of reason to guide us to virtue and happiness? Beholding incessantly these horrid spectacles, what could holy angels think of man, but that he was, as it were, a younger brother of the original murderer, delighting in the same work, and deeming no other employment so honourable? What could they think of the earth, but that it was in many respects a counterpart of hell; and that it would have been so more entirely, had it not been for the goodwill of God to men?

I mean not, my brethren, to declaim against the profession of arms, or to condemn all rulers and nations that engage in war. Some soldiers have been, and some are, Christians; but their profession is their cross, and its duties their self-denial: they would not willingly engage in any war of ambition, rapacity, or revenge; but they readily face danger, and endure hardship, in defence of their country. The more we hate war and long for peace, the greater are our obligations to such men, as thus expose themselves to guard us against injurious assailants; and the more fervently we ought to pray for their protection and

success. In the present state of the world war is a necessary evil, and often quite unavoidable: and that not merely when a nation is directly attacked; for there are many other ways by which the rapacious and ambitious may render a neighbouring country incapable of defending its liberties and possessions, and which can only be counteracted by vigorous opposition. Nor are private individuals generally competent to decide what wars are necessary and justifiable, or the contrary: in this respect rulers must give an account to God for their conduct. But wars proceed originally from the lusts of men's hearts,[1] and from the wicked one: God employs them, as he does hurricanes, earthquakes, or pestilences, as executioners of his vengeance on guilty nations: and ambitious conquerors, however accomplished or illustrious, are the most hateful and tremendous scourges of our apostate race. We may therefore deprecate and denounce war itself, as the most horrid and atrocious evil, consistently with the obedience and honour due to our rulers, and the most sincere prayers for the success of their measures, as far as they tend to the protection and welfare of our beloved country. But we must also maintain that all the blood shed in war is *murder*, chargeable on those whose criminal projects and politics render such dreadful methods of resisting them necessary; and that it will certainly be required at *their* hands, on which side soever the victims were slaughtered.

But to return from this digression: when Christ

[1] James iv. 1.

was born, angels sang, "Peace on earth:" peace between God and sinners; peace between a man and his neighbour; peace between contending nations; peace in heart and conscience; and peace throughout the earth. The Saviour is "the "Prince of peace;" the true "Melchisedec king "of Salem, the king of righteousness and the king "of peace:" "and of his government and peace "there shall be no end." The gospel is "the "word of reconciliation;" ministers are ambassadors of peace, through the great Mediator between God and man. Into whatever house the apostles entered they were directed to say, "Peace "be to this house:" and wherever we are sent we "go preaching peace by Jesus Christ." "He is "our Peace; he hath made peace by the blood of "his cross;" and he hath pronounced a blessing on "peace-makers, as the children of God."

When we embrace his gospel, "being justified "by faith we have peace with God;" he imputes not to us our trespasses, but admits us into a state of reconciliation, and a covenant of friendship with himself; and, by the Spirit of sanctification and adoption, teaches and inclines us cordially to love him, and to delight in his perfections, service, and salvation. Peace is the legacy which Christ hath left to his disciples: "Peace I leave with "you, my peace I give unto you; not as the "world giveth give I unto you."[1] When our hearts are stayed on the Lord in faith and hope, he "keeps them in perfect peace," and he imparts a "peace of God which passeth all understanding,"

[1] John xiv. 27.

to possess and confirm " our hearts and minds by " Christ Jesus." A stable peace of conscience, in reliance on the immense and everlasting mercy of God, through the all-sufficient atonement and mediation of Christ; which will bear investigation, and flourish in connection with deep humility, holy abhorrence of sin, and the strictest conscientiousness in all things; and an inward serenity and tranquillity of mind, in submission to the will of God and confidence in him; constitute this inestimable blessing.

The Lord hath also assured us that, " when our " ways please him, he maketh even our enemies " to be at peace with us:" and his peace ruling in our hearts disposes us " to follow peace with all " men." The precepts, as well as the promises of Christ, ensure peace to all his true disciples. The most sincere, upright, disinterested, and harmless conduct, united with tender compassion, courteousness, and universal benevolence; a disposition to make concessions and reparations for all injuries, and to forgive and love our enemies in the most unwearied and generous manner, are expressly commanded by the Redeemer; and these are also " the fruits of the Spirit," who dwells in all true believers. The most exact attention to all relative duties, according to the regular subordination of families and communities, is also effectually provided for. If therefore all men should at once be made true Christians, answerable to the specimen shewn to the world after the day of Pentecost; nay, according to that lower measure of grace bestowed on thousands in this land at present; the effect upon human affairs would be

as stupendous, as that produced on the boisterous winds and stormy waves, when the incarnate Son of God said, "Peace, be still, and there was a "great calm!" Wars and all concurrent and similar evils must instantaneously cease; and peace, equity, purity, truth, and love universally prevail; if all men were partakers of the Spirit of Christ, and obedient to his commandments.

But hath not he said, "Suppose ye that I am "come to give peace on earth? I tell you nay, "but rather division: for from heneeforth there "shall be five in one house divided, three against "two, and two against three."[1] To this it may be answered, that predictions of future events must be distinguished from commands, exhortations, and doctrines: and the latter, not the former shew the real nature and tendency of the gospel. When a few persons are converted, and feel their obligations to love Christ more than father or mother, and to obey God rather than man; and yet many remain under the influence of "that spirit who "worketh in the children of disobedience:" divisions will necessarily be the consequence. And, when the mad passions of ungodly men take occasion from Christianity to vent themselves, and the distinction between real believers and nominal Christians is overlooked; the tendency of the gospel must be mistaken. The opposition which the religion of Jesus has met with from the world; the wickedness that men have committed under the guise of Christianity; and the inconsistencies and indiscretions of many pious persons;

[1] Luke xii. 51—53.

have produced lamentable effects. Hence persecutions and religious wars have been excited, by the professed disciples of the Prince of peace! *Pious*, or rather *impious*, frauds have been practised to subserve the cause of superstition or hypocrisy! Acrimonious controversies and divisions among professed Christians have been multiplied; and even serious persons have been prejudiced against each other by a narrow and absurd bigotry. "Wo be to the world because "of offences! it must needs be that offences come; "but wo be to that man by whom they come!"

We must not, however, ascribe these things to Christianity, but to the want of it. If men were *real* Christians most of these evils would cease, and all of them would be mitigated; if men were consistent and judicious Christians, they would totally vanish. Even sincere disciples too often "know not what spirit they are of;" and contend for the truths and ordinances of Christ in a manner contrary to his precepts and example.

But it may also be observed, that all these effects spring from the depravity of the human heart as their native source; and, if men had not this occasion of discord and selfishness, they would find some other. After all, the world has seldom been more wicked, in the worst ages and places distinguished by the Christian name, than at other times and in other countries: though unbelievers have bestowed more pains in exhibiting its wickedness. In general, the state of human society has been greatly meliorated by the gospel: for where have Christians habitually diverted themselves by such bloody spectacles as the gladiatorial shews of

the Romans? Where have pagans manifested such humanity to the poor, sick, and destitute, as is displayed in the expensive institutions common in Christian countries? Vices, branded with deepest infamy even in this licentious age, were patronized and avowed among the politest heathens. War itself has assumed a milder aspect since the establishment of Christianity: and even deists have learned from the sacred oracles to denounce ambitious warriors, and to give the palm of glory to those "who save men's lives," instead of those that destroy them. These effects have evidently been produced by the gospel, even on the minds of multitudes who never believed it with a living and obedient faith.

Taking, however, our standard of Christianity from the scriptures, we are confident that, in proportion as it prevails, it will produce "peace on "earth," in all senses and in all places. We are also assured, that ere long the Prince of peace will possess the dominion over all nations as his willing subjects: and then they will "beat their swords "into plow-shares and learn war no more." Well therefore might angels sing at the Redeemer's nativity, "Peace on earth!" a blessing inestimable in itself, long unknown, or scarcely known, among men: but now about to be vouchsafed by a gradual progress to all the nations of the globe.

For such blessings virtually communicated to sinful men in the person of Emmanuel, angels also ascribed "Glory to God in the highest."—The perfections of God are his essential glory, which is incapable of increase or diminution: but in his

works he manifests this glory to his rational creatures, that they may contemplate, admire, and adore it; and he is glorified by them, when they delight to celebrate his praises. "The heavens "declare the glory of God;" and his eternal power and Deity are clearly seen in all the works which he hath made. His providential care of the universe manifests his wisdom, goodness, and bounty: his awful justice and holiness are displayed in his perfect law and righteous judgments: and his patience and kindness, even to sinners, may be learned from his dealings with our fallen race in general. These glories the heavenly host had witnessed and celebrated for four thousand years.

But the birth of the infant in the stable, viewed in its causes and consequences, discovered to them glories so resplendent as in some respects to eclipse all former displays; and with rapturous joy and admiration they sang, "Glory to God in the "highest"—in the highest heavens among all its exalted inhabitants, and in the loftiest strains which they can possibly reach. Here the glories of the divine justice, holiness, truth, wisdom, knowledge, power, love, and mercy, which they had viewed separately in other objects, shone forth with collected beams in most adorable beauty and splendour. The perfections which before appeared irreconcilable now harmonized, and reflected glory upon each other. The distinct honours of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, were displayed at once to their admiring view. And as they were always ready, with glowing love, zeal, and gratitude, to celebrate the high praises of God; so they were peculiarly excited to this reasonable

and delightful service on this interesting occasion. Never did JEHOVAH appear in all respects so glorious in holiness, justice, truth, and wisdom, as in his wonderful love to Adam's guilty polluted race. If God so hates sin that his well-beloved Son shall become man and bear the curse, rather than it shall go unpunished; and yet so loves sinners as to employ such an expedient, rather than leave them to perish without remedy: if his wisdom could form such a plan of reconciling justice and mercy, and of taking occasion from sin itself to glorify his name in the most distinguished manner: and if his faithfulness accomplishes such a promise as that relating to the incarnation of his own Son for these most gracious purposes: how transcendantly glorious must He be! how worthy of universal love and adoration! Let all creatures then say, "Glory "to God in the highest!"

Angels "rejoice over one sinner that repenteth;" because every event of this nature is a new display of the divine glory in the work of redemption; a new trophy of the Redeemer's beneficent victories; a new worshipper to join the heavenly choir to all eternity; and a new instrument to excite other sinners to seek for the same blessings. For alas! men are blind, wilfully blind, to the glory of God in all respects. Even the displays of his being and perfections in the works of creation fail of suitably affecting their hearts: "They glo-"rify him not as God, neither are thankful." But the gospel, professed, adorned, and preached in the world, calls their attention to an interesting subject: and, when "God, who commandeth the "light to shine out of darkness, shines into our

" hearts to give the light of the knowledge of his " glory in the face of Jesus Christ,"[1] that light is reflected, as it were, on every other object; and we learn by degrees to glorify God, for all the displays which he hath made of himself; and as a " spiritual " priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices, accep- " table to God through Jesus Christ." Thus sinners on earth are trained up for the worship of heaven; of which the highest and most delightful strain will be, " Worthy is the Lamb that was " slain, and hath redeemed us to God with his " blood;" " Salvation to our God that sitteth on " the throne, and unto the Lamb. Hallelujah! " Amen!"—The adoring praises of the heavenly host may therefore be also considered, as an affectionate expression of their longing desire that, by the gospel of Christ, the divine glory might fill the earth as well as heaven; while peace with God and with each other should be enjoyed by all its inhabitants, through the adorable good-will shewn to guilty man.—Let us then,

III. Endeavour to bring this matter home to ourselves by some practical deductions.

We may learn from this subject how insignificant all earthly distinctions are, in the judgment of the heavenly host. They see no glory in them nor dishonour in the want of them. The Lord of all descends to dwell on earth, to be a Prince and Saviour; and angels celebrate the august event the most important that had ever occurred from the beginning of the world. But he appears not in an imperial palace, or with the appendages of royalty; but in a stable, and laid in a manger

[1] 2 Cor. iv. 4—6.

And let us not forget that this was the settled purpose of unchangeable wisdom and everlasting love, in order to pour contempt on all that splendour, which we are prone to idolize.

Not only are "vanity and vexation" inscribed on the pomp, wealth, and luxuries of the world, by this remarkable appointment; but they are pronounced mean, ensnaring, and polluting. We should therefore inquire how far our judgment coincides, in this respect, with that of angels and the Lord of angels? The rich and noble should remember that their distinctions are as withering flowers; at the same time that they are talents entrusted to their stewardship, of which a strict account will shortly be demanded. Let them not then "be high-minded, or trust in uncertain riches, "but in the living God." "Let not the wise "man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty "man glory in his might, let not the rich man "glory in his riches." Yea, "God forbid that" any of us "should glory, save in the cross of our "Lord Jesus Christ; by whom the world is crucified "to us, and we unto the world."[1] We should well consider the words of the apostle, "Let the "brother of low degree rejoice in that he is ex-"alted; but the rich in that he is made low."[2]— "Mind not then," my brethren, "high things, "but condescend to men of low estate:" cultivate humility, courteousness, indifference about the world, and self-denying beneficence in the midst of abundance: this will abate envy, secure you from the snares and perils of your situation, and render the talents entrusted to you a blessing to

[1] Jer. ix. 23, 24. Gal. vi. 14. [2] James i. 9—11.

many, and more abundantly to yourselves.—"How "hardly," says our Lord, "shall they that have "riches enter into the kingdom of God!" But "the "things that are impossible with men are possible "with him." Yet this consideration should excite in you peculiar caution, watchfulness, and prayer, that your riches may not prove the ruin of your immortal souls.

Think, my brethren, of the stable, the carpenter's shop, the feast on barley-bread and small fishes, the well in Samaria, and of him who had not where to lay his head: that you may learn not to despise the poor, lest you reproach your Maker, and disdain the Saviour of the world. Heavenly glory and excellency may be clad in coarse raiment, or lodged in a mean cottage. Learn not to judge of men by outward appearances; but to estimate characters according to their intrinsic worth: and let it not be thought any disparagement to prefer the company of pious Christians, who are almost as poor as their Master chose to be, above that of the most accomplished persons who are strangers to his saving grace.

And, my brethren of low degree, let me exhort you to be contented and patient in your humble condition: watch against envy, repining, coveting, and distrust. Seek the true riches, "the orna-"ment which in the sight of God is of great "price," the "honour that cometh from him," and the pure pleasures which he bestows. With these, the meanest accommodations will make your hearts thankful: and, if your children be poorly provided for, and you are overlooked in times of difficulty by your neighbours; think of the virgin-mother and her holy infant in the stable; reflect

on your sinfulness; and, instead of murmuring, lift up your hearts in joyful thanksgivings: for few of you are so poor as the divine Saviour of sinners was, during the whole of his humiliation.

But, my friends, what do you think of this lowly Redeemer? Do your ideas of his dignity, excellency, love, and salvation, accord to the views of these holy angels? Or do you see in him no form or comeliness; nor any beauty for which you should desire him? Do you heartily sing, "Glory to God in the highest, and peace on "earth, good-will towards men?" or is there nothing in this great event to excite your attention and admiration? You can never be meet for the joys of heaven, unless you learn on earth to see and admire the glories of redeeming love. The songs of angels would grate in your ears, and discompose your hearts; were it possible for you to enter the mansions of the blessed, without having felt your need of a Saviour, and acquired a disposition to love and adore him. And how will the conduct of angels, who, though they never sinned, and need no pardoning mercy or renewing grace, yet glorify God with all their powers for his love to fallen men, rise up in judgment against the ingratitude and perverseness of perishing sinners; who make the very condescension of Emmanuel the pretence for refusing him the glory due unto his name.

Let us also inquire how far we resemble these heavenly worshippers in the temper of our minds. Exalted and holy as they are, they despise not sinful worms, "dwelling in houses of clay;" while they adored the Son of God, as tabernacling in human flesh, and thus "made a little lower than

"the angels for the suffering of death." They complain not of the special honour shewn to worthless man, by this union of the Deity with our nature, not with their's: they are not reluctant to our felicity, and object not to our being made equal with them. Yea, they willingly and joyfully minister to the heirs of salvation, in the meanest cottage, workhouse, or dungeon; nor do they deem the poorest believer an unmeet object of their condescending and compassionate services. This is genuine excellency: but have we been taught to resemble and imitate them? Are we thus attentive to the needy, ready to sympathize with the afflicted, and freed from selfishness, envy, and contempt of inferiors?—Above all, let us remember and imitate "the grace of the Lord Jesus, who, though he was "rich, for our sakes became poor, that we through "his poverty might be made rich." He hath said, "The poor ye have always with you; and "when ye will ye may do good to them." He hath appointed his needy disciples to be his representatives and receivers; that in supplying their wants we may express our love and gratitude to him, and copy his most endearing example.

This season is generally attended with an interruption of secular business, and some additional expense: yet the time and money are generally worse than thrown away, while professed Christians, like Israel worshipping the golden calf, "sit "down to eat and drink, and rise up to play." But, if we have a spiritual taste, and judge as angels do, we shall rather abridge ourselves of customary indulgences, than "make provision for the flesh," when commemorating the humble birth of the

self-denying Saviour. We shall express our joy, and employ our leisure, in acts of solemn worship and grateful praises: and, instead of expensive feasts for the wealthy, we shall abound in hospitality and kindness to the poor, and be glad to contribute to promote the cause for which the Son of God became incarnate.

The sensual and ungodly mirth of vast multitudes, at this festival, is madness. They abound in the works of the devil, because the Son of God was manifested to destroy them! when the very event thus commemorated will increase the weight of their condemnation, unless they can be persuaded to follow the apostle's counsel; "Cleanse "your hands, ye sinners, and purify your hearts, "ye double-minded; be afflicted, and mourn, and "weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning, and your joy into heaviness. Humble "yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall "lift you up."[1]

But "let the heart of those rejoice that seek the "Lord." Let the poor in spirit, the weeping penitent take encouragement from the astonishing instance of the Lord's good-will to sinful men, this day commemorated. And let all that have tasted this grace, and can rejoice in the love of God our Saviour, remember that they are subjects to the Prince of peace; that they may be animated, to pray for universal peace, and by all suitable means, to follow after peace, to seek the peace of the church, and the peace of the world; and "by "well doing to put to silence the ignorance of "foolish men."

[1] Jam. iv. 7—10.

SERMON XVI.[1]

I SAMUEL VII. 12.

Then Samuel took a stone, and set it between Mizpeh and Shen, and called the name of it Ebenezer; saying, Hitherto hath the LORD *helped us.*

FROM the calling of Abraham to the time of Samuel, the Lord had shewn peculiar favours of inestimable value to his chosen people. Especially "He shewed his word unto Jacob, his statutes "and his judgments unto Israel: he dealt not so "with any nation; and as for his judgments they "had not known them."[2] But they had always manifested a perverse and ungrateful disposition, and were continually provoking him with their idolatries and rebellions. "Therefore was the "wrath of the Lord kindled against his people, "insomuch that he abhorred his own inheritance: "and he gave them into the hand of the heathen; "and they that hated them ruled over them. "Their enemies also oppressed them, and they "were brought in subjection under their hand. "Many times did he deliver them; but they pro-"voked him by their counsel, and were brought "low for their iniquity. Nevertheless he regarded "their affliction, when he heard their cry."[3]

Hophni and Phinehas, the priests, the sons of Eli, had by their wickedness caused a most deplorable

[1] Preached January 1, 1796. [2] Psal. cxlvii. 19, 20.
[3] Psal. cvi. 40—44.

prevalence of impiety among the people: this provoked God to deliver them into the hands of the Philistines, who triumphantly carried off the ark of the covenant, which had been presumptuously brought into the field of battle. For the Lord was able to vindicate his own glory, and to honour that symbol of his gracious presence even among his avowed enemies, without countenancing the vain confidence of his hypocritical worshippers. The Philistines were soon constrained to restore the ark; but, while it was neglected in Israel, they retained their superiority. During the space of twenty years, Samuel, who at the beginning of these troubles was very young, seems to have laboured with zealous and unwearied diligence, in bringing the people to repentance, and reviving true religion. At the end of this time it is said, "All the house of Israel lamented after the Lord." The narrative of the subsequent reformation is indeed very brief; yet there is reason to conclude, that it was one of the most signal revivals of vital godliness that stand upon record: for "the chil-"dren of Israel did put away Baalim and Ashta-"roth, and served the Lord only."

A general assembly being convened at Mizpeh, where Samuel was publicly owned as judge of Israel; while they were earnestly seeking the Lord with fasting, prayer, and other religious observances; the Philistines, jealous of their proceedings, marched directly to attack them. But, in answer to the earnest prayers of Samuel and the people, these formidable enemies were entirely defeated. And, on this memorable occasion, "Samuel took "a stone, and set it between Mizpeh and Shen,

" and called the name of it Eben-ezer; saying, " Hitherto hath the Lord helped us." He set up a monument of God's kindness to Israel, (not of Israel's triumph over the Philistines;) to perpetuate the memory of his gracious interposition in their behalf, and to declare their gratitude, to future generations.

The history of Israel may be considered as God's experimental trial of human nature. The experiments of the chymist on an ounce of gold or mercury, when properly repeated and established, authorize general conclusions concerning the properties of all the gold or mercury in the world. Thus the dealings of the Lord with Israel, as a specimen of the human race, when rightly understood, warrant general conclusions concerning the dispositions and propensities of all mankind: for the whole is, as it were, one mass, and has the same nature and properties. It is therefore mere self-flattery to suppose that we should have acted better than they did, if we had been left to ourselves in exactly the same circumstances: and it is a vulgar prejudice to imagine that the Israelites were more wicked than other nations. Their history was more impartially written, and their conduct tried by a stricter rule: in all other respects the records of any country tend to establish the same conclusions concerning human nature.

The history of the visible church in every age entirely coincides with that of the Israelites: special mercies conferred; base ingratitude and rebellion; severe chastisements and the triumph of cruel enemies; humiliation and revivals of religion, followed by gracious providential deliver-

ances; form the compendium of the whole: but "Hitherto hath the Lord helped us," and "the "gates of hell have not prevailed."—The experience likewise of believers harmonizes in many respects with the records of Israel: and it is peculiarly useful frequently to review, with care and attention, all the Lord's dealings with us, and our conduct towards him; "for hitherto hath he "helped us."—To assist such a review, at the entrance of another year, will be the object of the present discourse; in which I shall,

I. Consider and illustrate the import of the words, "Hitherto hath the LORD helped us:"

II. Inquire what is meant by "Setting up an "Eben-ezer," according to the common, and not improper, use of the expression.

I. The import of the words, "Hitherto hath "the LORD helped us."

1. The Lord hath hitherto helped us all in his superintending providence. We came into the world indigent and helpless: our wants were numerous and urgent, and we were utterly incapable of making any provision for them. All these wants the Lord alone supplied; and others were merely the instruments by which he conferred his bounty. Numbers die in infancy, because they are not properly taken care of and provided for: but we were preserved; and, in the kindness and ability of parents or friends supplying our wants, we experienced, and should acknowledge, the distinguishing goodness of God. The use of our limbs, senses, and faculties; the measure of our natural abilities; and the advantages of our education, by which we were severally brought into our

present comfortable way of subsistence; as well as our possessions, with all that distinguishes every one's situation in society from that of others; should be traced back to the special kindness of the Lord. We should each of us remember, with good old Jacob, that "God hath fed us all our life "long unto this day."[1] He hath given us our temporal provision, whatever it hath been; and, if we have lived thirty, forty, fifty, or more years, without experiencing the want of food or the other necessaries of life; we have abundant reason to say, "Hitherto hath the Lord helped us." This has laid us under as deep obligations to gratitude, as if we had been fed by miracle, according to the kindness of the Lord to Israel: and in some respects we have had a decided advantage over them; for our supply has been more pleasant, in its nature and variety, than manna from the clouds and water from the rock would have been. "The "earth is the Lord's and the fulness of it." "He "openeth his hand and filleth all things living "with plenteousness;" and he hath put it in our power to obtain a portion of his bounty.

Nor have our *dangers* been fewer than our *wants*. What multitudes are swept away by various sicknesses and disasters, in every stage of human life, even from the earliest infancy! How many have all their days embittered by perpetual disease! What frequent instances do we witness of such as have been deprived of their limbs or senses; or even rendered most pitiable objects by incurable insanity! If then we have been favour-

[1] Gen. xlviii. 15.

ed with a comfortable state of health; if violent maladies have not seized on us, or have been removed; if the use of our eyes, ears, senses, limbs, and understandings have been continued, or restored to us; whatever second causes have concurred, we should thankfully say, "Hitherto hath "the LORD helped us."

Our lives and comforts are likewise exposed to perpetual dangers from wicked men. If then we have lain down in peace, one night after another, and risen in safety; if we or our dear friends have journeyed from time to time, without having been injured or even alarmed by robbers and murderers; or if, to shew us our danger, and remind us of our invisible Protector, we have been alarmed, and yet preserved from material detriment; how ought we to bless and praise the Lord for his peculiar kindness to us? Every time that we have gone from home, by land or sea; or have parted with our beloved relatives, thus called into distant parts; and on our return have met them in safety, without having experienced fatal disasters, or heart-rending distresses; should excite us to renew our grateful acknowledgments to the God of our lives.

Some of us can say, 'We were never, during 'all our past years, disturbed by the midnight 'alarm of fire in our habitations; our property, 'or part of our families was never thus tremen-'dously taken from us.' Others may indeed have been thus alarmed, and endangered, but were mercifully preserved, and extricated from the difficulties in which they were involved. And have

we not, my friends, abundant cause for gratitude to our kind Protector and Deliverer?

Let us not on this occasion forget the special mércies we enjoy in this favoured land. The nation has indeed, within our days, been frequently engaged in war, and great complaints have been made: but few of us know any thing experimentally of the horrors attending on actual warfare. We have not been shut up in besieged cities, nor witnessed the dismay, carnage, and devastation of such a scene. Streets flowing with human blood, or strewed with mangled corpses; the groans of the wounded and dying; the ruins or smoke of houses made the graves of the inhabitants; with all the dire effects of places being taken by assault, and given up to plunder and massacre; have not been rendered familiar to our senses. We have not beheld the fields ravaged by hostile armies; the labour of the husbandman destroyed; towns and villages reduced to ashes; and the neighbourhood rendered almost a desert; except as the engines of destruction, the conflicting armies, the moans of the dying, or the more affecting lamentations of surviving parents, widows, and orphans, give a sad variety to the dreary scene. How few comparatively of the human race have passed so large a portion of their lives, without sharing these sorrows, or having their hearts pained by these woful spectacles! Is there then no cause on this account to set up our Eben-ezer, and say, "Hitherto hath the Lord "helped us?" If any doubt of it, a few months' residence in a country that is made the seat of

war would effectually teach them (provided they be peaceably disposed,) to value a land of peace; and to be thankful, if henceforth they may know nothing of war, except from newspapers and taxes. —Many apprehensions have lately been entertained in our land on this account; but during another year we have been preserved. "Oh that "men would praise the Lord for his goodness, "and for his wonderful works to the children of "men!"

The same may likewise be observed concerning pestilences, earthquakes, hurricanes, famines, and other dreadful scourges of a guilty world. We have thus far been exempted from them; and our fears of these dire judgments, which desolate other cities and countries, with complicated miseries that baffle all description, should excite us to bless God, who hath hitherto distinguished us by his special protection.

It would occupy too much time, and prove tedious, to enter into further particulars of the deliverances, comforts, and mercies, which a kind providence hath vouchsafed us. This specimen may suffice to aid the serious inquirer in recollecting the peculiar favours that he has received during his past life: and this may prove one of the most useful studies in which he can engage.— It may, however, be proper to ask, whether there has not been some peculiar trial which you have dreaded more than any other? Now, if you have either been preserved from this, or have, beyond expectation, been supported and carried through it; you can scarcely help considering this as a

powerful call on you to say with gratitude, "Hitherto hath the LORD helped us."

But it behoves us also to inquire, in what manner we have received the blessings of a gracious providence, and what returns we have made for them? Alas, we have generally the utmost reason to confess our ungrateful forgetfulness of our Benefactor; our disposition to abuse or idolize his gifts, to undervalue them because not answerable to our exorbitant desires, to ascribe our safety and success to our own prudence and good conduct, or to spend our abundance in gratifying our carnal passions! This subject therefore, if investigated with care, may probably convince us that we have great cause to admire the Lord's goodness, in preserving us from *ourselves*, and the consequences of our own vices and follies. If we had been left without restraint, we might, either directly or by excesses, have long since proved our own murderers: we might have been hurried on, by violent passion or resentment, or in prosecution of some favourite project, to murder others, or have provoked them to murder us. We might in various ways have exposed ourselves to the sword of human vengeance: and it is indeed wonderful that God hath born with our rebellion and perverseness, and hath not cut us off in the midst of our sins. "It is of the Lord's "mercies that we are not consumed, because his "compassions fail not." We are infinitely indebted to his patience and long-suffering. He spared, protected, and provided for many of us, during a number of years, when we neither asked

him to do it, nor thanked him for his kindness. While multitudes were perishing around us, and several of our companions in ungodliness were cut off; while we sinned on amidst repeated warnings and narrow escapes; our offended God would neither destroy us, nor permit others to do it: nay, he prevented the fatal effects of our own madness and folly, and overruled many instances of it for our good. Thus he gave us space for repentance: his providential dealings with us had a tendency to excite our attention, and lead us to consider our ways: and every true penitent will perceive that they were actually designed to effect the most gracious purposes. We have been spared by the forbearance of our God, that we might be saved by his mercy!

2. God hath hitherto helped *believers* by his special grace.

Ages before we were brought into existence, he foresaw our wants and miseries, as the descendents of fallen Adam; "by whom sin entered into the "world, and death by sin:" and in infinite mercy he had made "all things ready" for our salvation, in the person and redemption of his beloved Son. In due season he blessed the land, which was destined to be our residence, with the light of the gospel; and by a variety of wonderful interpositions he hath continued to it that light, while it hath been extinguished or greatly obscured in other lands. When we found our lot cast in a country thus distinguished; we had, perhaps for a long time, no disposition to attend to the word of salvation; but lived, carelessly or by choice, in Egyp-

tian darkness on the very verge of Goshen. At length we were brought to hear the gospel, by events and circumstances in which we had no willing concurrence, or at least no intention of inquiring the way of life. Many have said, "I will go "into such a city, and continue there a year, and "buy, and sell, and get gain:" or, 'I will go, and 'take my fill of pleasure and diversion with my 'friends and companions:' but they have been disappointed of their aim; and in the very place of their purposed indulgence, gain, or preferment, have been induced to hear the word of God, and been made partakers of blessings inestimably precious. Thus the case of Saul, who went to seek the asses, but found them not, yet met with Samuel, and was anointed king of Israel, has been far exceeded. Secular inducements have led others to remove to places favoured with the faithful preaching of God's word, without the least intention of regarding it: but, after a while, curiosity, or persuasion, or some other motive, induced them to give it a hearing, and thus they were made wise unto eternal life, Some, having resided a long time in a situation where little regard was paid to religion, were at length excited to resist, with all their influence, the introduction of another kind of preaching, and were much chagrined at not being able to carry the point: yet afterwards attachment to a customary place of worship, or some motive of conveniency, brought them to hear the new doctrine, even the doctrine of "Christ "crucified;" and at length a total change in their views, dispositions, and conduct has filled them with admiring gratitude, and dictated most fervent

praises to the Lord. Nay, in some instances, a man's gross misconduct has proved the occasion of bringing him to hear the word of life to the salvation of his soul! Thus Onesimus, dishonestly leaving his master Philemon, fled to Rome, where the ministry of Paul was blessed to his conversion; and he became, as it is generally supposed, an able pastor of the Christian church: and thus, I trust, several, whose vices were the cause of their seeking admission into this hospital,[1] have here been brought to repentance, faith in Christ, and newness of life; and will admire to all eternity the manifold wisdom and inexpressible mercy of God to them, in this gracious dispensation.

In these, and numberless other ways, the Lord is "found of them that sought him not, and made "manifest to them that inquired not after him."[2] And the hints now offered may assist the serious Christian, in recollecting the peculiar means, by which God first "opened his eyes, and turned him "from darkness to light, and from the power of "Satan to God."

We should however observe, that numbers have been favoured with the same means, who never obtained the same blessing. It occurs therefore to inquire, "Who made thee to differ from another?" Some of us are conscious that, when we first heard or read the doctrine of Christ, which now is "all "our salvation and all our desire," we treated it, not merely with indifference, but with decided contempt and aversion. Nay, we opposed and reasoned against it with all our ability, calumniat-

[1] The Lock Hospital. [2] Rom. x. 20.

ing or ridiculing those who held it. We can remember how strenuously we endeavoured to silence our convictions, and to answer the arguments which almost prevailed over our prejudices: how we tried to quiet our minds, either by reflecting on our supposed virtue; by growing more punctual in a task of religion; or by listening to our own self-complacency and the flattery of our friends, in respect of the imagined superiority of our talents. When baffled on these grounds, we can recollect how we attempted to elude the conviction, by listening to disadvantageous reports concerning those reputedly *enthusiastical* teachers, who maintained the humiliating doctrines of grace; and, by charging their principles, on some occasions with tending to licentiousness, on others, by blaming them as too precise and rigorous in their requirements and example! Nay, perhaps some present, when all these methods failed, have tried to forget the whole in the hurry of business, a succession of company and dissipation, an excess of riot, or even a close application to study. Indeed it would not be wonderful, if some individuals should be conscious that, after all other attempts to quiet their consciences, they have had recourse to an antinomian or enthusiastical abuse of the gospel, as the last and most desperate expedient for keeping upon good terms with themselves, without parting with their worldly idols.

Not one of these ways of eluding conviction can be mentioned, which has not been tried by one or another; not one of these snares in which some of us have not been successively entangled: yet in every one of them numbers are finally given up to

" a strong delusion to believe a lie, that they might " all be damned, who believed not the truth, but " had pleasure in unrighteousness."[1] How is it then, my brethren, that any of us have been " re- " covered out of the snare of the devil, who had " taken us captive at his will?" We can in no other way account for it than by saying that God mercifully " gave us repentance to the acknow- " ledging of the truth."[2] " God who is rich in " mercy, of his great love wherewith he loved us, " even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened " us together with Christ." " For by grace are " ye saved through faith: and that not of your- " selves; it is the gift of God."[3] " The Giver of " every good and perfect gift," not only bestowed the Saviour, and the free pardon and salvation of all that truly believe in him; but gave us repentance and faith likewise, and made us " willing in " the day of his power:" and thus he has a claim upon us for the highest possible gratitude and admiring praise.

Even since the time when we first were " warn- " ed to flee from the wrath to come," and to " lay " hold for refuge on the hope set before us;" how numerous have been our conflicts, difficulties, and dangers? Many, who appeared to the most competent judges far more promising than we were, " in time of temptation have fallen away;" or " they have been choked with cares, and riches, " and the lusts of other things, and have brought " no fruit to perfection." Some have evidently returned to " their wallowing in the mire, and

[1] 2 Thess. ii. 11, 12. [2] 2 Tim. ii. 25, 26. [3] Eph. ii. 3—8.

" their last state is worse than the first." Others have been " carried about with every wind of doc- " trine, by the sleight of men, and cunning crafti- " ness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive." Thus they have proved " unstable in all their ways," have become the zealous propagators of some pestilential heresy, or have " turned aside to vain " jangling." Many have grown lukewarm in the grand essentials of religion, and proportionably fierce and contentious in supporting certain dogmas, by which some parts of the truth are pushed to anti-scriptural extremes. In short, in a course of years, if we have accurately observed the affairs of the church, we have witnessed and lamented many astonishing changes, suited to excite our gratitude to God, who " hath hitherto helped us," and guided us at a distance from those rocks, quicksands, and whirlpools, which have proved fatal to numbers.

Our own experience likewise may help us to form a proper judgment of the divine goodness, in thus far protecting and upholding us. If we have for any length of time " fought the good fight of " faith," we must have a consciousness, that in many instances we were " cast down, but not de- " stroyed." Our enemy has been sometimes ready to rejoice over us as actually vanquished. Outward circumstances gave force to our innate depravity, and our customary or easily besetting sins; the tempter was permitted " to sift us as wheat;" " we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that " we should not trust in ourselves, but in God that " raiseth the dead " Perhaps temptation prevailed against us; and a guilty conscience united with an

unbelieving despondency to bring us into "deep "waters." The insults of enemies, or the censures of friends, perhaps concurred with divine rebukes and corrections, to dismay our hearts. Yet amidst all we determined, even "from the belly of hell," to look unto the Lord, and to cry unto him, "O "Lord, I beseech thee, deliver my soul!" We waited on "him, and he heard our prayer; he "brought us out of the horrible pit, out of the "miry clay; he set our feet upon a rock and esta- "blished our goings; and he hath put a new song "into our mouth even praise unto our God."[1] Thus "he delivered us from so great a death, and "in him we trust that he will yet deliver us."[2] Even if our conflicts have not been so severe, if we have not been thus baffled and shamed, we know to whom we owe our preservation: and we have had so many humiliating proofs of our own perverseness, weakness, negligence, and relapses into idolatrous attachments and various evils, that we cannot but look upon our escapes as marvellous, and sometimes stand amazed that we have not been left to renounce or disgrace the gospel! Every year, month, week, or even day, during which we have been preserved, and every declension from which we have been recovered, is an addition to obligations already great beyond all computation.

Indeed a general view of our situation in this evil world must increase our conviction that the Lord alone hath kept us, or can keep us, from evil. The countless dangers of our path; the course of

[1] Psal. xl. 1—3. cxvi. 1—8. cxxx. [2] 2 Cor. i. 9, 10.

the world, with its maxims, fashions, examples, and allurements; the influence of fear, hope, affection, and even gratitude to men, upon our religious conduct; our natural strong desire of honour, friendship, ease, wealth, or indulgence; our aversion to censure, reproach, contempt, and poverty; and the various ways, in which these propensities may be addressed to turn us aside from the direct path, suggest many interesting reflections to the serious mind. The infectious examples even of some zealous preachers and professors of evangelical truth, and the worldly spirit sanctioned by them; with the snares, which are laid in all our employments, connexions, and comforts; in solitude and in company, and even in religious duties: the number, power, subtlety, and unwearied malice of our enemies the powers of darkness: the fallibility of our judgment, the scantiness of our knowledge, the weakness of our purposes, and the deceitfulness and "desperate wickedness" of our hearts: all remind us, how greatly we are indebted to the Lord, who hath "hitherto helped us." It is indeed a marvellous mercy, if we can say, "Having obtained help of God, we continue to this "day;" and have neither "made shipwreck" of our faith, nor brought a scandal upon the gospel; but still desire with purpose of heart to cleave unto the Lord.

Much more might profitably be added, did time permit, concerning the continued kindness we have received; in the friends raised up for us; and, the way in which our heavenly Father hath made up our losses, extricated us out of difficulties, moderated our temptations, renewed our comforts,

revived our hopes and earnestness, prolonged our days, and afforded us means of grace and opportunities of usefulness. These and many more subjects may be thought of, in our private meditations, while we endeavour to enter on another year with thankfully acknowledging that "hitherto the "Lord hath helped us."—We inquire then,

II. What is meant by "Setting up an Eben-"ezer," according to the common, and not improper, use of the expression.

The nature of the case, and the example before us, concur in proving that it implies a disposition to give God the glory of all the blessings we have received. We do not ascribe the favourable difference between our situations, prospects, or character, and those of other men, to our own wisdom, management, or exertions; but to that God 'from 'whom all holy desires, all good counsels, and all 'just works do proceed.' We pretend not to have merited the divine protection, guidance, and blessings; but feel that all was given us, as creatures, without our deserving any thing; and that every good thing bestowed on us, as sinners, is contrary to our deserts. We ascribe none of our deliverances or successes to chance, necessity, or second causes: but trace them all to the great First Cause; to him "who doeth all things after the counsel of "his own will." Samuel gave not the honour of Israel's preservation to any of the servants of God, who had been raised up from the days of Moses; nor did he take it to himself; but ascribed it to the Lord alone. "Who then is Paul, and who is "Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, "even as the Lord gave to every man? I have

" planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planted any " thing, neither he that watereth; but God that " giveth the increase."[1] To set up an Eben-ezer therefore implies a disposition to say, in praise as well as in prayer, " Not unto us, O Lord, not unto " us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy " and for thy truth's sake:"[2] and to ascribe all our blessings to the everlasting love of the Father, to the atonement and mediation of the Son, and to the sanctification of the Holy Spirit.

It implies also an open acknowledgment of our obligations to the Lord; a confession of our own unworthiness; and an endeavour, by all proper means, to perpetuate the memory of his great goodness towards us, in our families, and among all with whom we are connected. An open profession of the truth, with a consistent example and conversation, attendance on the ordinances of God, diligence in the instruction of children and domestics, and the improvement of our several talents to promote true religion, constitute such an avowal of our obligations to the Lord. These things tend to diffuse the knowledge of his abundant kindness, and to preserve the remembrance of it, for the encouragement of our brethren, and an inducement to sinners to seek the participation of our privileges.

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[1] 1 Cor. iii. 5—7. [2] Psal. cxv. 1.

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In these respects the Lord's supper is a stated method of setting up an Eben-ezer. When, with serious recollection and self-examination; with renewed exercises of repentance, faith, and love; with humble confessions, fervent prayers, and thankful praises, we commemorate the sufferings and death of our Redeemer: we then join ourselves to the Lord and his chosen people; we avouch him

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to be our God; we thank him for the past, and commit ourselves to his keeping for the future; and we declare our determined purpose, by his grace, to walk in his holy ways during the remainder of our lives. It seems therefore peculiarly proper to begin a new year with this solemn act of adoring praise, this renewed dedication of ourselves to the service of our God and Saviour.

This review should likewise excite us to be "followers of God, as dear children, and to walk in "love, as Christ also hath loved us." Our conduct towards others ought to be a constant imitation of the long-suffering, compassion, readiness to forgive and relieve, and persevering goodness, of the Lord towards us; that "we may never be "weary of well-doing," or "be overcome of evil;" but that we may "overcome evil with good."

Finally, the recollection, and thankful acknowledgment that "Hitherto hath the Lord helped us," should encourage our hearts to run with patience the remainder of "the race set before us." "The "Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the "lion, and out of the paw of the bear, will deliver "me out of the hand of this Philistine."[1] He, that hath preserved and assisted us in so many dangers and difficulties already, will "never leave us nor "forsake us." "He fainteth not, neither is weary." His understanding is infinite, his resources inexhaustible, his faithfulness unfailing, and his mercy everlasting. We should therefore comfort one another with these considerations; learn "to "cast all our care on him who careth for us;" and

[1] 1 Samuel xvii. 37.

pour out our hearts before him: we should remember that "our Father knoweth what things "we have need of," and that "no good thing will "he withhold from them that walk uprightly." "Clouds and darkness are about Him," and gloomy prospects may meet our view: but the perfections and covenant-engagements of the Lord are unchangeable; and "we know that all things work "together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." "He "will never suffer us to be tempted above that we "are able: but will with the temptation make a "way to escape, that we may be able to bear it:" yea, "the Lord shall deliver us from every evil "work, and will preserve us to his heavenly king-"dom: to whom be glory for ever and ever. "Amen."[1]

These are some of the encouragements and instructions, which real Christians may receive from the subject before us. But how stand matters with our souls? Hitherto the Lord hath prolonged our lives, and we now enter on another year; while numbers have been removed to the regions of darkness and despair, and some to the realms of endless day. Many of our acquaintance or relatives are gone to their long home; yet we remain in the land of faith, of hope, of mercy, and of prayer. But "the time is short;" "the end of "all things is at hand." A little moment, as it were, will terminate our season of probation and preparation for eternity; the continuance of our

[1] 1 Cor. x. 13. 2 Tim. iv. 18.

earthly comforts or trials, and our opportunities of doing good to men, and glorifying God in this world of sin and misery.

Have none of you then entered on this new year destitute of vital godliness, strangers to repentance and works meet for repentance, and unacquainted with a life of faith in the Son of God, and communion with the Father through him? Are none of you still loitering and procrastinating, loath to part with worldly idols, and averse to diligent piety? Or are you not trying to persuade yourselves that so much strictness is unnecessary; that by attention to decent forms and moral duties, or an assent to certain doctrines, you may reconcile religion with your worldly spirit and pursuits, and thus serve God and Mammon? You have indeed been spared to enter on another year, and have great cause, though little heart, for thankfulness: but what assurance have you that you shall live to the close of it? Several who joined with us last year in the service of the day have now entered on an eternal state; and probably many of us will join them before this year shall terminate. And how terrible will this be to those who, by a perverse abuse of the Lord's abundant mercies, have increased their own condemnation! Still "the "Holy Ghost says, To-day if ye will hear his "voice, harden not your hearts." "Seek ye the "Lord while he may be found; call ye upon him, "while he is near." And we intreat you, join your prayer for yourselves to our supplications in your behalf, that in the present year you may be "turned "from darkness to light, and from the power of "Satan unto God."

Perhaps some are blessing God that this has been their happy case, during the preceding year; and are now saying within themselves, 'Had I 'died before the year 1795, I should have perished 'in my sins, without Christ and without hope. 'But the Lord who spared me when others were 'cut off, and rescued me from numberless dangers 'seen and unseen, when I habitually trampled on 'his commandments, and neglected his salvation, 'hath at length, in boundless mercy, "granted me "repentance," enabled me to believe in the Lord 'Jesus Christ, and taught me by his grace to walk 'in newness of life. "Bless the Lord, O my soul, "and forget not all his benefits; who forgiveth all "thine iniquities, and healeth all thy diseases; "who redeemeth thy life from destruction, and "crowneth thee with loving kindness and tender "mercy."'—How memorable with you my brethren, even to eternal ages, will be this "acceptable "year of the Lord," which to many hath doubtless been "the day of vengeance of our God!" Oh, endeavour to 'shew forth his praises, not only with 'your lips, but in your lives, by giving up your-'selves to his service, and by walking before him 'in holiness and righteousness all your days.' Then many will glorify God on your behalf, and you will be in some degree instrumental in bringing, others to seek the same blessings. Abide in Christ; keep close to the means of grace; watch against temptation; "be not high-minded, but fear," for your enemies are many and your hearts deceitful; yet "be sober and hope unto the end:" "for "greater is he that is in you, than he that is in

" the world." Wait on the Lord continually, that he may " renew your strength :" and take heed lest an increase of knowledge and maturity of judgment should be attended by an abatement in the fervour of your affections. Be not contented with the low attainments of this lukewarm age; but follow those who have most closely followed Christ. And now approach with us to his table, to avow your acceptance of his salvation, and surrender of yourselves to his service; that, as " bought with a price, you may glorify God with " your bodies and spirits which are his."

Some perhaps to this very day, may stand in doubt to what class or company they belong. May the Lord enable such persons to begin this new year with " giving all diligence to make their " calling and election sure !" Inquire, my friends, with impartial strictness, into the reasons of your uncertainty and darkness: cast away every idol, break off every entangling pursuit or engagement, return from your backslidings and seek the Lord with all your hearts: that, should this year terminate your lives, your setting sun may break forth with cheering beams, and gild the dark valley through which you must pass: or, should you be spared, that your walk may be henceforth more close with God, more honourable and comfortable, and more edifying and encouraging to those around you.

My Christian brethren! let us enter on this new year by seriously reviewing the one that we have finished: that we may be humbled for the sins, into which we have been betrayed, and rendered

more simply dependent and watchful: and that we may be more thankful for the special mercies, personal, social, and public, with which we have been favoured. Let us earnestly beg a blessing from God on every attempt which we have made to sow the seed of truth, to speak a word in season, and to recommend the gospel: beseeching him also to prevent the bad effect of our mistakes and inconsistencies. We should likewise remember that "time is short:" that we may learn "patience in "tribulation, joyfulness in hope," indifference about things present, and diligence in our proper work. "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do "it with thy might: for there is no work, nor "device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave "whither thou goest."[1] "Let your loins then be "girded, and your lamps burning;" and be habitually expecting the coming of the Lord. Endeavour to recollect what designs of usefulness you had formed, and intended to have executed during the last year, or in any former period; and set about them without delay: persevere in every good work, and Christian course, on which you have entered; and aim to press forward, "to grow "in grace," and abound more and more in all the fruits of righteousness. Then should this be your last year, as it possibly may, and as some have probable reason to expect, death will be your gain: and while the survivors among us may meet together at the return of this season to set up another Eben-ezer to our merciful God; others

[1] Eccles. ix. 10.

will have joined the company before the throne, and be triumphantly rejoicing and blessing the Lord, that he hath helped them quite through, made them "more than conquerors," and placed them for ever out of the reach of dangers and enemies.—May we all, as in succession called out of this world, thus join the heavenly worshippers; till at length,

> 'When all the chosen race
> 'Shall meet before the throne,
> 'To bless the conduct of his grace,
> 'And make his wonders known;'

we may be found of that happy number, and meet once more to set up an Eben-ezer in the world above, and to join in eternal adorations of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, the one God of our salvation, to whom be praise and glory for evermore! Amen.

SERMON XVII.[1]

JOHN I. 29.

hold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world!

HN the Baptist, the predicted forerunner of the ssiah, was doubtless well informed of his per-, offices, and kingdom. He "prepared the ay of the Lord," by preaching repentance as ispensably necessary to a participation of the ssings about to be communicated; and, while baptized the people with water, as an outward blem of their souls being washed from sin; he lared that the Redeemer would "baptize them ith the Holy Ghost and with fire." He bare ness to the Saviour as the Son of God, the degroom of the Church, and "the Lamb of od which taketh away the sin of the world." cried, saying, "This was he of whom I spake, "that cometh after me is preferred before me; or he was before me: and of his fulness have e all received." He added on another oc-ion, "The Father loveth the Son, and hath iven all things into his hand. He that be-ieveth on the Son hath everlasting life; and e that believeth not the Son shall not see life: ut the wrath of God abideth on him."[2]

[1] Preached on Good-friday, 1796. [2] John iii. 35, 36.

It is evident that this most eminent servant of God laboured to communicate to his disciples exalted apprehensions of the Lord Jesus, and to excite in them large expectations from him. In honouring the Son of God he was willing to abase himself, "as unworthy to loose his shoe-latchet." He was astonished to think that the Saviour should come to be baptized of him, when he was conscious that as a sinner he stood in need of his spiritual baptism: and, when we consider the excellency of John's character, with the extraordinary things spoken of him in scripture, we shall know what conclusions to draw from his testimony. Certainly he would not have concurred with those, who employ all their abilities in trying to persuade mankind not to think too highly of Christ, not to honour him too much, and not to depend on him too entirely in the great concerns of eternal salvation.—But the words of the text must be exclusively our present subject; and from them we may inquire,

I. On what account Christ is called "The Lamb "of God:"

II. The import of the words, "Who taketh "away the sin of the world:"

III. The call to "behold the Lamb of God:"

IV. The peculiar instructions to be derived from meditating on the subject.

I. On what account is the Lord Jesus called "the Lamb of God?"

We should not forget, my brethren, that the language of scripture was dictated by the Holy Spirit, and demands our most reverent attention on that account. If then we interpret it in a

general way, and treat those metaphors under which divine mysteries are revealed, as we would do the language of mere men, who often use pompous words and extravagant figures of speech without much meaning; we shall be found guilty of despising the sacred oracles. No doubt every metaphor or illustration was selected, in preference to all others, for some wise and holy reasons: and suggests important instruction to the teachable student. This must especially be the case with that expression of the text which engages our present attention; because it frequently occurs with reference to the character, sufferings, and salvation of Christ.

A lamb is the well known emblem of innocence, gentleness, patience, and purity: and no doubt an allusion was made to these things in speaking of the Redeemer as the Lamb of God. Yet we cannot suppose that this was the principal meaning of that appellation, when we duly consider the various passages in which it is used: for in what sense could a lamb "take away sin," except by becoming an atoning sacrifice?

The slaughter of innocent animals, and consuming the whole or some part of their bodies upon an altar, was an essential part of religious worship, from the entrance of sin to the death of Christ. Those animals alone were used for this purpose, which were the valued and useful property of man, and the most perfect of their kind: but lambs were by far the most common oblation. Thus Abel "by faith" brought the firstlings of his flock as an offering unto the Lord, and was accepted; but *faith* must have reference to a divine testi-

mony, command, or appointment: this Cain disregarded, "leaning to his own understanding," and virtually denying his need of an atonement; and therefore he was rejected. No sooner was Noah liberated from the ark than he offered burnt-offerings to the Lord:[1] and doubtless the general opinion, that such sacrifices were proper to appease the anger of the gods, was derived from original tradition; for it seems to have no ground at all in human reasonings.

When Abraham, at God's command, went with full purpose of heart to offer his beloved son for a burnt-offering, Isaac, as acquainted with the customary oblations, said, "My father, where is the "lamb for a burnt-offering? And Abraham said, "My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a "burnt-offering."[2] Under the law, a lamb was the daily sacrifice, morning and evening: and on the sabbath days this was doubled, Thus harmless lambs, free from all spot and blemish, were presented at the altar day by day; while the priest, as representative of the congregation, laid his hands on the head of the sacrifice, and doubtless confessed over it the sins of Israel, which typically were by imputation laid upon it. Then the blood of the lamb was shed; and its body prepared and burnt upon the altar, by the fire which came down from heaven, as an emblem of the divine justice inflicting vengeance on the guilty. And, when the blood had been sprinkled and poured out, according to the appointment; the priest went into the sanctuary, and burned incense on the golden altar,

[1] Gen. viii. 20, 21. [2] Gen. xxii. 7, 8.

while all the people prayed without in the courts of the temple.[1]

But the paschal lambs, which immensely exceeded in number all other sacrifices that were offered, (when the law was regularly observed,) were most emphatically prefigurative of Christ and his atonement. The unblemished lamb for every family was selected four days before the passover, when it was sacrificed in the presence of the elders and congregation of Israel: its blood was then sprinkled on the lintels and door-posts of their houses; and its body roasted whole was eaten within by all the professed people of God. The feast was celebrated with unleavened bread, and they were directed to eat it with bitter herbs, and with staves in their hands; in remembrance of their affliction in Egypt, their preservation when the first-born were slain, and their marvellous deliverance from bondage. The apostle teaches us how to interpret these things when he says, "Christ, "our passover, is sacrificed for us; therefore let "us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither "with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but "with the unleavened bread of sincerity and "truth."[2] He is the true paschal lamb, the spotless sacrifice for sin: he was predicted four thousand years before his coming in the flesh: and at length he was crucified for us, at the demand, and in the presence of the rulers and people of Israel. His intense sufferings, from the fiery wrath of God against our sins, answered to the prescribed roast-

[1] Lev. i. 4; xvi. 21. Num. xxviii. 3—10. Luke i. 9, 10.
[2] 1 Cor. v. 7, 8.

ing of the paschal lamb. The profession of faith in his blood externally places the soul under the divine protection, while vengeance is denounced against unbelievers: but the inward experience of true Christians, who secretly 'feed on Christ in 'their hearts by faith with thanksgiving,' corresponds with their avowed dependence on him. In genuine sincerity and simplicity of heart, they exercise repentance, and mourn for their sins; they deny themselves, take up their cross, and bear sanctified afflictions; and, being set at liberty from Satan's yoke, they set out on their pilgrimage to the heavenly Canaan.

With allusion to these types the apostle says, "Ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, "as silver and gold, but with the precious blood "of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and "without spot; who verily was fore-ordained be- "fore the foundation of the world, but was mani- "fest in these last times for you."[1] And John saw in his vision, "a door opened in heaven;" "and "there stood a Lamb, *as it had been slain:* and "the four living creatures and four and twenty "elders fell down before the Lamb, and they sang "a new song, saying, Thou wast slain and hast "redeemed us to God with thy blood." The angels also joined these representatives of the universal church, "saying with a loud voice, "Wor- "thy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, "and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and ho- "nour, and glory, and blessing."[2] On another occasion the apostle "beheld, and lo, a great

[1] 1 Pet. i. 18—20. [2] Rev. iv. 1; v. 6—13.

"multitude, which no man could number, stood "before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed "with white robes, and palms in their hands; and "cried with a loud voice, Salvation to our God "which sitteth on the throne, and unto the Lamb." "These are they, which came out of great tribu- "lation, and have washed their robes and made "them white in the blood of the Lamb; there- "fore are they before the throne of God; and the "Lamb, which is in the midst of the throne, shall "feed them, and shall lead them unto living foun- "tains of waters."[1]

It is evident that the emblem of a lamb that had been slain, in all these places, refers to the death of Christ, as the sacrifice for our sins, and the antitype of all the legal sacrifices, "Without "shedding of blood is no remission;" but "it is "not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats," or of lambs, "should take away sins."[2] As there- fore all that were pardoned and saved, from the first entrance of sin, were partakers of the benefits arising from the one oblation of Christ once offer- ed; so He is called "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world."[3]

It is my design in these citations to remove every shadow of doubt, and every degree of hesi- tation from your minds, concerning the meaning of the words, "The Lamb of God," The honour of the divine law and government, and the satis- faction of the divine justice in saving sinners, re- quired an atonement of infinite value. The wis-

[1] Rev. vii. 9—17.
[2] Heb. ix. 22; x. 4.
[3] Rev. xiii. 8.

dom of God therefore planned this method of redemption, and Christ is the Lamb of God's *appointment*. "When he cometh into the world "he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest "not, but a body hast thou prepared me: in "burnt-offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast "had no pleasure: then said I, Lo, I come (in the "volume of the book," in the opening of the roll of scripture, "it is written of me,) to do thy will, "O God."[1] All other methods of expiating guilt, and rendering the salvation of sinners honourable to God, were unavailing: but, when the Lamb of God came, and offered himself as an atoning sacrifice, the required satisfaction was made, and no further oblations were necessary.

But this appointed atonement was likewise of God's *providing*. The plan of redemption by a sacrifice of infinite value would not have profited us sinners, if everlasting love had not provided such an oblation. The whole universe could not have supplied a single individual, whose dignity and excellency qualified him for such an undertaking; or whose love was so immense as to influence him to interpose in our behalf. But God "spared not his own Son;" he "gave him to be "the propitiation for our sins;" he *accepted* the oblation which he had appointed and provided: and in all these respects Christ is "the Lamb of "God."—We proceed,

II. To consider the import of the words, "which "taketh away the sin of the world."

The unblemished harmless lambs, which were

[1] Heb. x. 4—10.

sacrificed from the beginning, had no guilt of their own; yet they suffered as if they had been guilty. They were substituted in the place of the criminals; and the guilt, or desert of punishment, was typically transferred from the sinner to the sacrifice. It was *imputed* to the animal, who bare the punishment, while the offerer escaped: and it took away his sin by expiating the guilt of it.—Thus the Lord Jesus was substituted in our place; our guilt was transferred to him by imputation: He was sinless himself, and yet suffered as a sinner, in order "that whosoever believeth in him "should not perish but have everlasting life:" and in this manner he "taketh away sin."

We are not, however, left to deduce this conclusion from types and shadows, or our own reasonings concerning them: for the sacred writers have most explicitly and energetically declared the same great truth. The prophet Isaiah, in his most wonderful prediction of the sufferings and glory of the Redeemer, says, "He was wounded "for our transgressions, he was bruised for our "iniquities. All we like sheep have gone astray: "we have turned every one to his own way, and "the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us "all." "It pleased the Lord to bruise him, and "to put him to grief: thou shalt make his soul "an offering for sin.—He shall bear their ini-"quities.—He bare the sin of many." You see, my brethren, that Christ not only bare our *punishment*, but our *iniquities:* and this can imply nothing less than actual translation of guilt from the sinner to the sacrifice. 'It was exacted, and

'he became answerable.'[1] He willingly consented to become our surety, to assume our flesh, and expiate our sins by his own suffering and death upon the cross. He was capable of doing this, and willing to do it. The human nature he assumed was preserved free from all contamination of sin: so that his life was not forfeited, or suffering deserved, by any personal transgression. He had power to lay down his life and power to take it again, and no mere creature ever was or can be placed in a similar situation. "He loved us and "gave himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice "unto God for a sweet smelling savour."[2] The imputation of guilt no more implied criminality or pollution, than the sacrificing of the harmless lamb rendered it sinful and defiled: or than a man becomes chargeable with the extravagance and profligacy of the poor insolvent whom he liberates from prison by paying his debt, out of the most generous compassion.

And let us not suppose, that this language concerning Christ "bearing our *sins*," was merely that of prophecy or poetry: for the writers of the New Testament, in didactive prose, are equally decisive, or even more so. "He was made sin for "us who knew no sin; that we might be made "the righteousness of God in him."[3] This certainly implies a reciprocal imputation of our sin to Christ, and of his righteousness to us. "Christ "hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, be-

[1] Bishop Lowth's Translation of Isa. liii. 7.
[2] Eph. v. 2. [3] 2 Cor. v. 21.

" ing made a curse for us."[1] " Who his own self " bare our sins in his own body on the tree." " He suffered once for sins, the just for the un- " just, that he might bring us to God."[2] " Be- " ing justified freely by his grace, through the " redemption that is in Christ Jesus; whom God " hath set forth to be a propitiation, through faith " in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the " remission of sins—that he might be just and the " justifier of him that believeth in Jesus."[3] These and many similar expressions, as connected with the institutions of the ceremonial law, and the reasonings of the apostle in his Epistle to the Hebrews, are abundantly sufficient to prove, not only that the doctrine of an atonement by the vicarious sufferings of Emmanuel is contained in scripture, but that it is the most prominent and central part of revelation. This is confirmed by the appointment of the Lord's supper, in perpetual remembrance of the death of Christ; and for a constant representation of the life of faith, under the figure of " eating the flesh and drinking the " blood of Christ." We may therefore confidently affirm, that they who deny or explain away this doctrine prefer their own reasonings to the sure testimony of God, and endeavour to remove the key-stone of an arch, the whole of which would at length fall down, if they could succeed. So that mere natural religion, which palliates and flatters human pride, will uniformly be preferred to the religion of the Bible by all who lose sight of this fundamental doctrine: and facts do fully demon

[1] Gal. iii. 13. [2] 1 Pet. ii. 24. iii. 18. [3] Rom. iii. 24—26.

strate that this has always in process of time been the consequence, when persons have argued themselves and others out of the ancient and orthodox interpretation of redemption by the Saviour's atoning blood.

But the present occasion admits not a fuller discussion of this important subject. The propitiatory oblation made by the Lamb of God, being of infinite value, was sufficient to take away the original and actual sin of mankind, even as if it had been but one complex transgression. Millions in every age have received the benefit of it; and, if the whole human race should at once apply for pardon and salvation by the blood of Christ, it would suffice to take away all their sin. The efficacy of the typical sacrifices was confined wholly to the Jewish nation: but that of the one atoning sacrifice of Christ extends equally to other nations. It is sent to them all without exception; and we can assure any sinner throughout the earth, that if he believe in the Son of God he shall be saved. So that none perish because there is no help for them; but because pride, love of sin, and aversion to the spiritual service of God, harden their hearts in unbelief, and they "will not come to Christ "that they might have life. In this sense "the "Lamb of God taketh away the sin of the world."

But he also taketh away guilt from the conscience by the *sprinkling* of his blood.[1] The atonement made upon the cross eventually profits none but those who apply it to themselves. This is represented in the Lord's supper, as it was of old by

[1] 1 Pet. i. 2.

the eating of the paschal lamb, with the sprinkling of its blood. We are not communicants merely by hearing of, or seeing, the emblems of Christ's body and blood, but by eating and drinking them. The Lord Jesus "who gave himself a ransom for "all, to be testified in due time,"[1] sends his gospel to sinners, and by the powerful convictions of the Holy Spirit effectually destroys their self-confidence; then their conscience becomes burthened with the guilt of their former sins; and, whatever efforts they use to get relief, all prove ineffectual, till they understand the nature, and see the suitableness and glory of redemption by the blood of Christ. Applying in true repentance and living faith for an interest in this propitiation, they find the load of guilt removed, and obtain stable peace, connected with deep humiliation, hatred of sin, watchfulness against it, acquaintance with the divine law in their own hearts, and great tenderness of conscience. "For, if the blood of bulls and of "goats, and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling the "unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh; "how much more shall the blood of Christ, who "through the eternal Spirit offered himself with-"out spot to God, purge your conscience from "dead works to serve the living God."[2] Nothing but this view of the cross, this application to "the "blood of sprinkling," this washing in "the foun-"tain opened for sin and uncleanness," can give that kind of peace and confidence which hath been described: because nothing else can shew the enlightened and humbled heart the divine justice

[1] 1 Tim. ii. 5, 6. [2] Heb. ix. 13, 14. x. 22.

and holiness, in harmony with mercy and truth, glorified in pardoning and saving the chief of sinners. And, whenever this peace has been lost through relapses into sin, there is no other way of recovering it but that in which it was first obtained: nay, indeed, it cannot be preserved in the midst of those numberless imperfections and defilements that accompany our best days and duties, except by continual application to "the blood of "Christ which cleanseth from all sin."

In consequence of the atonement and intercession of Christ, the power of the Holy Spirit destroys in the heart of his disciples, the dominion, love, and pollution of sin; by means of the motives, encouragements, and ordinances of the gospel. In this sense also, "the Lamb of God taketh "away the sin of the world:" for this is the only method by which the hearts of men, all over the world, can be made holy; and all men in every nation of the earth, who believe in the name of Christ, are thus "sanctified by faith in him."[1]— "Christ also loved the church, and gave himself "for it, that he might sanctify and cleanse it with "the washing of water by the word; that he might "present it to himself a glorious church, not hav- "ing spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that "it should be holy and without blemish."[2] "You, "who were—enemies in your minds by wicked "works, yet now hath he reconciled; in the body "of his flesh through death; to present you holy, "and unblamable, and unreprovable in his sight."[3] "He gave himself for us, that he might redeem

[1] Acts xxvi. 18. [2] Eph. v. 25—27. [3] Col. i. 21, 22.

" us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a " peculiar people, zealous of good works."[1] Thus will the Lamb of God continue to take away the sin of believers all over the world, till there be no remains of it left; and till the whole company shall be " presented faultless before the presence of his " glory with exceeding joy."[2]

III. Then we consider the call to " behold the " Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the " world."

I shall not confine myself to the exact import of the words as spoken by John, but refer likewise to several other scriptures of a similar nature. " There " is no God else beside me, a just God and a Sa- " viour;—look unto me and be ye saved, all the " ends of the earth."[3] " As Moses lifted up the " serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son " of man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth in " him should not perish, but have eternal life."[4] " Looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of " our faith, who for the joy set before him endured " the cross, despising the shame: and is set down " at the right hand of the throne of God."[5] The Baptist may be supposed to have addressed his disciples to this effect: 'You want pardon of your 'sins, and deliverance from the power and pollu- 'tion of iniquity: " Behold " then " the Lamb of " God which taketh away the sin of the world." 'He alone can confer these blessings; apply to 'him, become his disciples, rely on him entirely, 'and follow implicitly his directions: thus you will

[1] Tit. ii. 14. [2] Jude 24. [3] Isa. xlv. 21, 22.
[4] John iii. 14, 15. [5] Heb. xii. 2.

'be saved, and be made instrumental to the salva-
'tion of your fellow sinners.'

But we may understand the call in a more comprehensive sense, as an exhortation to meditate seriously and frequently on the great doctrines thus revealed: to behold and contemplate the person and redemption of Christ with fixed attention and humble faith. He seems to address us from the cross, and to say, "Is it nothing to you, all ye that "pass by? Behold, and see, if there be any sorrow "like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me: "wherewith the Lord hath afflicted me in the day "of his fierce anger."[1] Let us then turn our thoughts from all other subjects, and with believing application to ourselves, contemplate the interesting scene which we this day commemorate.

We cannot well enter on such meditations, without adverting to the language of the sacred writers concerning the essential and eternal Deity of Christ, One with the Father, the Creator and Upholder of all worlds, the Object of universal worship and adoration. We consider this glorious Person coming in the flesh to be the Saviour of the world, "to seek and save the lost," from mere love and compassion to deservedly perishing sinners. The spotless purity of his human nature; the perfection of his obedience to the divine law; the depth of his voluntary humiliation: the poverty and contempt, and "the contradiction of sinners," which he endured through life; demand our most serious attention. He effected not his gracious purposes in our behalf as a monarch or a conqueror: he taught

[1] Lam. i. 12.

not as a philosopher or a moralist: "but he took "upon him the form of a servant," and "gave his "life a ransom for many."

We should, however, especially contemplate the variety and intenseness of his sufferings in the closing scene of his humiliation: the excruciating pain he endured from the scourge, the thorns, and the nails, and when hanging on the accursed tree; with the anguish of mind he felt when agonizing in the garden, and when on the cross he exclaimed, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" It is very important for us to reflect on what the Redeemer suffered from *men*; from the base treachery of Judas, the unfaithfulness of Peter, the cowardice of the disciples; the cruel injustice of Caiaphas, the scribes, priests, council, and even their servants; from the contempt and indignity put upon him by Herod and his men of war; the cruelty and scorn of Pilate's soldiers; the lingering tortures of the cross, the ingratitude of the insulting multitude, and the revilings even of the malefactors.—We should recollect likewise that this was the hour and power of darkness: and, what gloomy imaginations and detested thoughts might be presented to the mind of Christ, by the subtle and energetic influence of *evil spirits*, may be best conceived by those "who are not ignorant of their devices." "He "suffered, being tempted, that he might be able to "succour them that are tempted:" and the assaults of Satan in the desert may convince us that he would do his utmost, when permitted, to bruise the heel of Him who came to crush his head and destroy his works.

But we are also taught, that "it pleased *the*

"*Lord* to bruise him, and to put him to grief; and "to make his soul an offering for sin." "Awake, "O sword, against my Shepherd, and against the man that is my Fellow, saith the Lord of Hosts; smite the Shepherd."[1] "He spared not his own "Son, but delivered him up for us all." And, when we compare our Lord's agony in the garden, and his exclamation on the cross, with the conduct of his own disciples under the severest tortures; we must be convinced that his cup was embittered inconceivably more than their's, and that consolations and supports were vouchsafed to them, of which he was wholly left destitute. We cannot explain this subject. We may be certain that remorse of conscience, despair, and the prevalence of hateful passions, which will eternally increase the misery of condemned sinners, could have no place in the mind of the holy Jesus: but whatever pain, shame, wrath, curse, agony, or misery, he could possibly endure; whatever the justice of God, the honour of the law, and the instruction of the universe in the evil and the desert of sin, required; all this the Redeemer suffered, till he could say with his expiring breath, "It is finished."

It should likewise be remembered that our Lord most willingly submitted to all these sufferings, from love to our souls and regard to the glory of God. "No man had power to take away his life:" the prince of this world had no part in him; no personal transgression exposed him to the sentence of death; but "love, that passeth knowledge," moved him to give himself a propitiatory sacrifice

[1] Zech. xiii. 7.

for our sins! The meekness, patience, and persevering fortitude, with which our Lord suffered, should not pass unnoticed. "He was led as a "lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before his "shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth." "Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example "that ye should follow his steps: who when he "was reviled reviled not again; when he suffered "he threatened not."[1]

The circumstances attending his crucifixion also form a proper subject of meditation. The sun was miraculously darkened, as a token of the divine displeasure, and an emblem of the gloom which overspread "the Sun of righteousness." Yet, in this deep humiliation of the Lord of glory, he rescued one perishing sinner from the jaws of destruction, and took him with him to paradise. When he expired, "the veil of the temple was rent," the rocks were torn by an earthquake, the graves were opened, and the preparation made for the resurrection of those saints who were appointed to grace the triumph of the rising and ascending Saviour. For the event of his sufferings in his personal exaltation, and in the complete salvation in body and soul, of all the unnumbered myriads, which ever did or ever shall believe in him, is the last particular to which our present meditations should be directed.—But it is time for us to proceed,

IV. To consider the peculiar instructions to be derived from these contemplations.

The worth of our immortal souls is most empha-

[1] 1 Pet. ii. 21—23.

tically taught us by the cross of Christ. "What "is a man profited if he gain the whole world and "lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in "exchange for his soul?" Could any one literally gain the whole universe, as the price of iniquity, and keep it with every imaginable advantage during the term of human life; it could neither preserve his body from the grave, nor his soul from eternal misery. "It costs more to redeem the soul: that "must be let alone for ever." View the Saviour agonizing in Gethsemane, and expiring on the cross! Did he endure these unknown sufferings to preserve men from temporal poverty, pain, or death? By no means: but to deliver them from "the wrath to come:" where "their worm dieth "not, and the fire is not quenched." Who can doubt then that an immortal soul is man's principal treasure? It is possessed by the meanest, and it infinitely exceeds in value all the distinctions of the mightiest. He who made the soul knows its worth: and he deemed it so valuable, that he ransomed our souls from ruin at the price of his own blood. Shall we not then deem the salvation of them our grand concern, and regard all interfering objects as unworthy our notice in the comparison? If we should never succeed in any one thing all our lives, except in this chief concern; our felicity will be congratulated by angels to eternity: if we should prosper in all other respects, and fail here; our folly and misery will be lamented and execrated for ever.

Our children also have immortal souls. Does then our love of them induce us to use every means of providing for their comfort in this world; and

shall it not influence us to proportionable earnestness in seeking their salvation? O cruel and infatuated parents, who take excessive care about the bodies of your children, and leave their precious souls to perish everlastingly for want of diligent instruction: or perhaps even help to murder them, by indulging their sinful dispositions, and setting them a bad example!—Nay, let us further learn to consider that our relatives, neighbours, and enemies, have immortal souls. Because they are so valuable, "he that winneth souls is wise;" let us then think nothing too much to expend or attempt, in promoting that grand object for which the Son of God shed his precious blood.

But, viewed in this glass, how vain do the world and all things in it appear! "God forbid that I "should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus "Christ; by whom the world is crucified to me, "and I unto the world." What are empires, or the loss of them? what renown, or infamy? what affluence or poverty? what the most exquisite pleasure or torturing pain, when put in competition with eternal happiness or misery? or when viewed in connexion with the cross of Christ? Had he not so loved us, all possible prosperity could not have prevented our everlasting misery: if we believe in him; all possible adversity cannot prevent our everlasting happiness. Let us not then envy the wealthy and successful, but pity and pray for them: let us not covet worldly things, repine for want of them, or lament the loss of them: let us not join in the vain mirth of condemned sinners, or be satisfied with any thing short of the joy of God's salvation.

By contemplating the cross of Christ, we may learn the perfect justice and holiness of God, the excellency of his law, and the desert of sinners. In the condemnation of fallen angels and wicked men, and in many other awful ways, the Lord hath proclaimed his abhorrence of iniquity, and his determination to magnify his holy law: yet, his mercy not being visible in those events, it might have been thought, either that he was incapable of shewing mercy, or that in exercising mercy he would abate from the demands of justice, and connive at transgression. But the subject before us, well understood, confutes all such vain imaginations. When mercy triumphed most illustriously, justice was most gloriously displayed, the law most honoured, and sin most exposed to universal detestation. 'Rather,' says the Saviour, 'will I bear the curse of the divine law, and the 'punishment of sin, in my own person, and make 'an expiation of infinite value by my sufferings 'and death upon the cross; than either leave 'sinners to perish without help, or allow the law 'to be dishonoured, and justice to be relaxed for 'their benefit.' "Do we then make void the law "through faith? God forbid, yea, we establish "the law."

Here again we may learn repentance, and abhorrence of our iniquities. "They shall look on "me whom they have pierced, and mourn." The more lovely and glorious the divine perfections appear, the more excellent the holy law, and the more hateful and destructive transgression are found to be; the deeper should be our sorrow and remorse, while we recollect and review all our

numerous and heinous offences, and all their aggravations: and the more ought we to dread and hate those evil propensities, from which all our crimes proceed, and which continually aim, as it were, to "crucify the Lord afresh, and put him to "open shame." When we view the miseries of the world, and the ravages of death, we may well inquire, "Who slew all these?" And the consideration may help to abase us for sin, and excite us to oppose and crucify our lusts, which are the murderers of the whole human race, and menace our destruction. Yet the cross of Christ, when duly contemplated, suggests far more powerful motives for contrition and self-abhorrence, and will far more effectually influence us to seek the destruction of those hated enemies, that crucified the Lord of glory.

But the same object will likewise teach us, that neither our repentance or amendment, nor any thing else that we can do, will at all serve to expiate our guilt, or justify us in the sight of God. "If righteousness come by the law, then Christ "died in vain." Men set up a variety of reasonings against the express and numerous testimonies of God to this leading truth; and thus vainly "go "about to establish their own righteousness." But a serious view of the Lamb of God, as "taking "away the sin of the world," may convince us that every hope they form of escaping condemnation or obtaining life, except by faith in a crucified Saviour, will most surely prove fallacious and ruinous: for, if any thing else would as effectually have answered the purposes of God, he would doubtless have spared his own Son, and saved sinners in some other way.

On the other hand, we here behold the riches of the divine compassion and tender mercy towards the sinful children of men. "Herein is love, not "that we loved God, but that he loved us, and "sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." If then God so loved us when enemies, what may not those expect from him, who renounce every other plea, and "flee for refuge to lay hold on this "hope set before them?" In every penitent who supplicates mercy for the sake of Christ and his atoning blood, the Redeemer "sees of the travail "of his soul, and is satisfied." For this very purpose he suffered and died on the cross, "that he "might become the author of eternal salvation to "all them that obey him." On this ground we say, "Let the heart of them rejoice that seek the "Lord: and "if, when we were enemies, we were "reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much "more being reconciled, we shall be saved by his "life." "He that spared not his own Son, but "delivered him up for us all, how shall he not "with him freely give us all things?"

But while we mingle our tears of godly sorrow with joyful thanksgivings, and glory in Christ Jesus amidst all our tribulations; let us also, my brethren, look to the cross, and learn our obligations to the most self-denying and devoted obedience. Can we, with this object full in view, deem any expense too great, any sacrifice too costly, any cross too heavy, any labour too severe, which his glory, the authority of his command, or the benefit of his purchased flock, call us to undergo? Surely the constraining love of Christ will render every loss or suffering tolerable, yea pleasant, to the thankful believer; while he beholds

the Lamb of God expiring on the cross, to take away that sin which would otherwise have eternally ruined his soul; and to purchase for him everlasting and unutterable felicity!

Here too we must look, that we may learn patience, meekness, spirituality, and every part of that holiness to which we are called. Hence we must draw our motives and encouragements; and here we must view that perfect example, which we are required to copy. Forgiveness of injuries, love of enemies, perseverance in well-doing amidst insult, contempt, and ingratitude, and compassion to perishing sinners, are best learned by looking to the cross; by witnessing the triumph of divine love in the sufferings of Emmanuel, and hearing him mingle his dying groans with prayers for his cruel and insulting murderers.

Meditation on this subject may also convince us that we must expect tribulation in the world, and the enmity or contempt of believers, if we belong to Christ and bear his image. His wisdom, holiness, and love were perfect: yet no one of our race ever experienced such hatred and insult from all ranks, orders, and descriptions of men, as the spotless Lamb of God! Malefactors commonly meet with some pity amidst their tortures, however merited: but Jews and gentiles, rulers, scribes, priests, soldiers, and the multitude, could unite in cruel mockery of the holy Jesus, when expiring on a cross! Away then with all those flattering sentiments of human nature, which represent it as loving and delighting in genuine excellency: the cross of Christ, and the sufferings of his most faithful servants in every age, form a demonstrative confu-

tation of the proud delusion! And, if our hearts have been changed by divine grace, so that we love and imitate the lowly and humble Saviour, let us count our cost, expect scorn and hatred from men, tribulation in the world, and peace and consolation from the Lord alone. Let us also look beyond the cross, and contemplate the glory which followed; "that we may not be wearied and faint "in our minds." We too have a "joy set before "us:" let us then endure our lighter cross, and despise the shame; assured that "if we suffer with "Christ, we shall also reign with him" in glory.

But, my fellow sinners, where will you appear at his second coming to judge the world, if you now neglect his great salvation? If you join his enemies; and, by cleaving to your sins, prefer Barabbas to Jesus, sell him as Judas did for a few pieces of silver, or determine you "will not have "him to reign over you?" Still he invites you to come to him, that you may have life eternal. Oh! that you would seek to him as a Saviour, who will shortly come to be your Judge.

In fine, contemplating the cross of Christ, teaches us most effectually every lesson contained in the sacred scriptures. Let us then, my brethren, further prosecute our meditations at the Lord's table: and, while we remember the love and sufferings of our Redeemer, let us renew our repentance, and acceptance of his salvation, and give up ourselves to his service; that, "as bought with a price, we "may glorify him with our bodies and spirits "which are his."

SERMON XVIII.[1]

1 CORINTHIANS XV. 20.

Now is Christ risen from the dead.

We learn from this chapter, that some of the Corinthians had denied the doctrine of a resurrection: probably explaining away the apostolical language on that subject as figurative, and as only meaning conversion, or that change which took place in the world by the introduction of Christianity.[2] In confuting this dangerous error, the apostle called their attention to the resurrection of Christ, as an undeniable fact: and he shewed that the denial of a resurrection was equivalent to saying that Christ was not risen, and thus tended to subvert the foundation of Christianity, and to destroy the hopes and comforts of believers. "If "there be no resurrection of the dead, then is not "Christ risen: and, if Christ be not risen, then is "our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain: "yea, and we are found false witnesses of God.— "And, if Christ be not raised, ye are yet in your "sins: then they also which are fallen asleep in "Christ are perished. If in this life only we have "hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable." All the joys and supports of Christians are inseparably connected with future and eternal felicity; without the hope of which they would

[1] Preached on Easter Sunday, 1796. [2] 2 Tim. ii. 17, 18.

have nothing to counterbalance their peculiar trials and conflicts.

If Christ were not risen, believers were yet in their sins, and even the martyrs had finally perished. But were not the primitive Christians converted from idols to serve the living and true God? Did they not "repent, and do works meet for re-"pentance?" Were they not exemplary in the practice of all good works? And did they not meet death for the sake of a good conscience towards God? How then could they be "yet in their sins?" —Because none of these things could atone for their transgressions; and, if Christ were not risen, no effectual atonement had been made: they must therefore have still continued under condemnation, and exposed to the curse of the law which they had broken. A most conclusive proof that the death of Christ was a vicarious satisfaction for sin; and that none can be saved, who are not interested in that atonement!

It is deemed uncandid to charge men's doctrine with the consequences resulting from them: yet I apprehend we should all consider ourselves bound to warn people against the consequences of taking a poisonous mixture, even if he who administered it was not at all aware of its nature: and the apostle has here set us the example of doing the same, in opposing those erroneous doctrines by which immortal souls are fatally deceived.

He then adds the words of the text, "Now is "Christ risen from the dead," and proceeds to treat very copiously on the doctrine of the resurrection. But I shall confine myself to the subject before us, and attempt,

I. To prove that Christ is risen from the dead:

II. To shew the inferences which may be drawn from that event;

III. To apply the subject to ourselves.

I. I shall prove that Christ is risen.

Though true Christians have "a witness in "themselves," which in general satisfies their minds as to the certainty of the things which they have believed; yet, in peculiar seasons of temptation, an acquaintance with the evidences of Christianity would tend greatly to their establishment. And, in these times of infidelity and scepticism, all, who would "contend earnestly for the "faith once delivered to the saints," should be able "to give a reason of their hope" to every inquirer or objector: both to defend themselves from the charge of enthusiasm and credulity; to obviate the doubts of those with whom they converse; and to preserve young persons, perhaps their own children, from the fatal contagion. It is therefore greatly to be lamented that pious persons are in general so little furnished with this sort of knowledge, of which they might make such important use.

It is commonly said that the new Testament is built upon the foundation of the Old, and must stand or fall along with it: and there is a truth in this sentiment, though somewhat diverse, in its nature and consequences, from that which is generally supposed. Our Lord and his apostles have so frequently quoted the Old Testament, and almost every part of it, as "the scripture," "the word of "God," "the oracles of God," and "the language "of the Holy Ghost," that their credit must be

connected with the divine inspiration of the books thus repeatedly attested by them.—We are able to prove that the canon of the Old Testament in those days differed very little, if at all, from that which we have at present, yet our Lord referring to different parts of it says, "Thus it is written, and "thus it must be," "the scripture cannot be "broken," "the scriptures must needs be ful- "filled." And the apostles say, "All scripture is "given by inspiration of God:" "Holy men of "God spake as they were moved by the Holy "Ghost." This single consideration completely establishes the whole of the Old Testament as a divine revelation, with all those who duly reverence the words of Christ and his apostles. In all other respects the New Testament stands on its own basis, and is proved to be the word of God by distinct evidence: it affords unspeakably more support to the Old Testament than it receives from it; and the resurrection of Christ alone is sufficient to authenticate the whole sacred volume.

The restoration of a dead body to life is no more difficult to omnipotence, than the production of life at first. The divine operation is in both respects alike incomprehensible: but, as we continually observe life to be communicated in a certain way, we call that the law of nature; though we understand not our own meaning, and cannot explain how causes produce their effects. But dead bodies do not return to life in the ordinary course of human affairs: we therefore suppose some law of nature to the contrary, the violation of which in any particular instance, we should call a miracle; that is a divine interposition and operation to

produce an effect, above or contrary to the general energy of second causes. Some persons indeed pretend that this is impossible: but "why should 'it be thought incredible with you, that God 'should raise the dead?" The power exerted is no greater than that by which thousands of infants receive new life every day: and will man presume to say, that God cannot, or shall not, exert his power in any way which they have never before observed?—If a sufficient reason can be assigned for his extraordinary interposition, and the fact be indisputably proved; it becomes as credible as other well attested events; many of which do not coincide with our expectations or ideas of probability.

Universal history, observation, and experience prove that "the world lieth in wickedness." Idolatry, superstition, impiety, and every kind of vice and misery, have in all ages, covered and desolated the earth. But it hath pleased God, of his infinite mercy, to reveal himself to sinful men; to make known a way in which they might be reconciled to him and recovered to holiness; and thus to introduce a religion suited to rectify the disorders of the world, and to unite the honour of his name with the eternal happiness of unnumbered millions. Miracles, and the resurrection of the Redeemer especially, formed a suitable demonstration that this religion came from God; and they served to arrest the attention of mankind: for alas! sinners for the most part are too much occupied about the affairs of this life, to notice those things which relate to God and their eternal state.—These are reasons assigned for a divine interpo-

sition on this occasion; and more important cannot possibly be conceived.

The Jews, the most inveterate enemies of Christianity, preserve, with profound veneration and scrupulous care, the books of the Old Testament, which have been handed down in the same manner from generation to generation, during a long succession of ages. These books evidently contain a system of prophecy, centering in the person and redemption of the Messiah; and, among other particulars, his sufferings and death are circumstantially foretold, with clear intimations of his resurrection and subsequent glorious kingdom.[1]

We know also that the gospels were made public in the earliest ages of Christianity; for they are continually quoted and referred to by those writers whose works have been preserved: and from them we learn, that our Lord predicted his own death and resurrection on the third day, in so explicit a manner that the Jewish rulers were aware of it, and took their measures accordingly. Yet, when the body of Christ was delivered to Joseph, they were so fully satisfied, by what they saw and heard, of his being really dead, that they made no objection on that ground: but they requested Pilate that the sepulchre might be securely closed, and guarded by Roman soldiers, till the third day was past; lest the disciples should steal his body, and say that he was risen again. After all their precautions, however, the body was gone, and they were never able to shew by whom it was removed, or what became of it.

[1] Psalm ii. xvi. 8—11. Isai. liii. 10—12.

Here let us pause, that we may consider the credibility of testimony.—One consistent witness, of sound understanding and fair character, who has no apparent interest in deceiving, is often deemed sufficient to determine the sentence of life or death, the most important of all temporal concerns: but, if three or four such witnesses should agree in deposing, that they saw such a murder or robbery committed by the prisoner at the bar, no sober man could doubt of the fact, or scruple to pronounce him guilty. Now there were twelve appointed witnesses to the resurrection of Christ, of plain good understanding, and unexceptionable character: for Peter's denial of his Lord, through the force of sudden temptation, forms no impeachment of his integrity; seeing he so honestly confessed his guilt, and so fully proved the sincerity of his repentance by his subsequent conduct: and, when Judas by transgression fell, another was chosen in his place. These witnesses had constantly attended Jesus during some years, and must have been competent to know him from all other men. They were remarkably incredulous respecting his resurrection; and his crucifixion seems almost to have extinguished their hopes: how then can it be supposed that they would have attempted to overpower or deceive the vigilant and valiant Roman soldiers, and to steal the body of Jesus? In so desperate an undertaking they must have been sure to excite the combined rage of both the Jewish and the Roman rulers: and success itself could only expose them to hatred, persecution, and all kinds of hardships and sufferings. It is manifest that, from the time they

began to bear witness to the resurrection of Christ, they renounced all prospects of worldly interest, ease, or greatness; and willingly embraced poverty, labour, contempt, bonds, stripes, and perils as their portion. So that no possible account can be given of their conduct, unless it be ascribed to a principle of conscience: while the strict and exact morality of their writings demonstrates, that they could not be actuated by false principles: for they do not allow men, in any case, to do evil that good may come; and they condemn all kinds of imposition with the most decided severity. Is it then possible for human beings deliberately to choose temporal and eternal misery, and to persevere in decided adherence to a plan which, on their own principles, ensures their damnation in another world, as well as a complication of miseries in this present life?

The witnesses of our Lord's resurrection survived that event a long time; some of them nearly forty years, and John still more. They were after a while separated into different parts of the world; and seemed to have no common interest, except in the success of Christianity: they passed through a series of the severest trials, and almost all of them died martyrs in the cause: but no change of circumstances or situation, no promises or threatenings of men, no repeated tortures or impending dangers, induced one of them in the smallest degree to waver in his testimony. They declared unanimously that, on the third morning after the crucifixion, a vision of angels told some of their company, at the sepulchre, that their Lord was risen; that afterwards they all saw him repeatedly;

that they examined his hands, feet, and side, and were sure it was the same body which had been nailed to the cross; that he ate and drank with them several times; that at length, after giving them particular instructions relative to their future conduct, he ascended from among them, till a cloud intercepted their sight of him; and that two angels appearing to them declared he was gone to heaven. Such an unwavering, persevering testimony of twelve persons, whose holy lives, diligent labours, disinterestedness, and patient sufferings evince their sincerity, forms so complete a proof, that, in any other case, he who should not be satisfied with it would be deemed sceptical almost to insanity.

This is, however, but a very small part of the evidence afforded us in this most important concern.—Saul the persecutor was a man endued with superior talents cultivated by education, and possessed of peculiar advantages for rising in the world; of which he was evidently availing himself while gratifying his implacable enmity to the gospel. Yet was he, all at once, converted into a most zealous preacher of that faith which he had attempted to destroy: and, renouncing all his former principles and worldly prospects, yea, exasperating above measure his powerful patrons and employers; he spent all the remnant of his days in the most self-denying labours, hardships, and sufferings, endured with the greatest alacrity, for the sake of Christ and the gospel: and at length he sealed his testimony with his blood. How can this fact be accounted for, unless we allow the truth of his narrative concerning the manner of

his conversion? And, if that be allowed, the resurrection of Christ is demonstrated.

In the chapter whence our text is taken, this man declares, that Christ appeared after his resurrection to "above five hundred brethren at once." of whom "the greater part remained" to that time. This was an appeal to nearly three hundred living witness of that event: but no one ever attempted to disprove the truth of his assertion; though false teachers would have concurred with open enemies in such an attempt had it been practicable.

The testimony of the apostles to the resurrection of Jesus implied a charge of the most complicated wickedness against the rulers of the Jewish nation: these had the power in their hands, and were every way concerned to vindicate their characters, and punish those who thus accused them. This might readily have been done, had they produced the Roman soldiers in court, to testify that the body of Jesus had been stolen, or to state in what way it was removed from the sepulchre.

But in fact they had bribed the soldiers to circulate a self-contradictory report on this subject, which would not bear investigation: and, when St. Matthew soon afterwards charged this publicly upon them, and declared that the story was generally current among the Jews to that time; no one attempted to deny or disprove the charge! In every case of this nature silence must be construed into a confession of guilt: and, if the rulers could have accounted for the removal of the body, without either admitting the truth of Matthew's charge, or our Lord's resurrection, no doubt can reasona-

bly be made, that they would have done it in the most public manner.

Every reflecting person must perceive, that the evidence is completely satisfactory, provided it can be made clear that these books were published at the time to which they refer. To obviate therefore every doubt on that head, without engaging in an argument far too complicated for this occasion, I would inquire, at what subsequent time it could have been possible to obtain credit to writings of this description? If a manuscript, said to have been long concealed in some library, be produced or published, as the work of an eminent author, who flourished two or three centuries ago; it immediately is subjected to a severe scrutiny, and imposture in such cases seldom escapes detection. But writings which contain a circumstantial narrative of "things not done in a corner," but in the open view of mankind, during several years; and connected with an epistolary correspondence resulting from them: could never have obtained the least credit in the world, if published after the times referred to, with an express appeal to mankind, that they had all along been familiarly acquainted with them. Such an insolent attempt to persuade whole nations out of their senses and understandings must have excited universal astonishment and indignation: or, had it been possible to convince a few individuals that they had received these books from their ancestors, and been taught from infancy to revere them as the writings of the apostles, when in fact neither they nor any other persons had ever seen or heard of them; the effrontery of the deceivers, and the credulity of the

deceived must have constituted an unprecedented event, and marked the age in which it occurred. As therefore no time can be mentioned, when any attempt of this kind is so much as hinted at, by either Christian, Jewish, or Pagan historians; we might be confident that the writings in question were extant, and well known in the church, from the very period in which they are said to have been published; even had we no other evidence. But no impartial man of learning can be imposed upon by pretences of this kind; having access to abundant proof of another nature that the books of the New Testament were extant in the early ages of Christianity: and this argument is principally adduced for the benefit of those who have neither leisure nor advantages for these investigations.

We should also remember, that on the day of Pentecost, immediately following the resurrection of Christ, the Holy Spirit was poured out on the assembled apostles, with such extraordinary circumstances as drew together vast multitudes who then resided at Jerusalem. In the presence of all these witnesses they spake, fluently and correctly, in the languages of the several countries from which their hearers were collected: though it was certainly known that they had not had the opportunity of learning them: and this stupendous miracle, together with Peter's sermon on the occasion, was made effectual to the conversion of three thousand persons. The gifts of tongues, and of working miracles in the name of Jesus, were ever after continued to them, and were frequently exercised in the most public and undeniable manner, before numerous witnesses, enemies as well as friends

The same powers were likewise communicated to many others, by the laying on of the apostles' hands. The time, place, occasion, and circumstances of these extraordinary transactions are frequently specified in their writings. Thus the inhabitants of many cities and countries were appealed to; and the enemies of Christianity were challenged to disprove their pretensions. But none ever attempted to do it: for the Jews themselves do not deny that many extraordinary works were performed by Jesus and his disciples; and the way, in which they try to account for them, demonstrates that from the first their ancestors had nothing plausible to object. In this manner the witnesses and proofs of our Lord's resurrection were multiplied, in almost every part of the vast Roman empire: yea, "God also bare them witness, "both with signs and wonders, and with divers "miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost." And can any reasonable man suppose that a general belief could ever have prevailed, through whole nations, of such public and extraordinary events, without any person attempting to deny them; if they had not actually happened, and been so notorious as to be uncontrovertible?

The chosen witnesses of our Lord's resurrection were likewise the principal writers of the New Testament, and the whole was doubtless written under their inspection. Now in these books prophecies are inserted, which have been accomplishing ever since to the present day. A sceptic indeed might doubt, whether the predictions concerning the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple were not written after the event: but who can account for

other parts of the same prophecy, without allowing that the writer was divinely inspired? "The peo- "ple shall be led away captive into all nations, "and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the gen- "tiles, until the times of the gentiles be ful- "filled."[1] Has not this been actually the case with the Jews and with Jerusalem during almost eighteen hundred years? Could human sagacity have foreseen such an unparalleled series of events? Or would God have thus confirmed the testimony of impostors? And does not this prophecy, thus wonderfully accomplished, demonstrate the resurrection of Christ, and the truth of Christianity? The coming of "the man of sin," with "lying miracles," doctrines of demons," "worshipping of "angels," "prohibitions of marriage," and "com- "mands to abstain from meat;" the impositions, usurpations, and persecutions of the Roman Antichrist; with various other particulars, were most exactly and circumstantially predicted by the several witnesses of our Lord's resurrection: and the undeniable accomplishment of these prophecies are so many divine attestations to their testimony, for the satisfaction of all succeeding generations.

The Jewish ritual, or the pagan theology, was intimately connected with the foundations of the several governments then existing in the world: and all the learning, ingenuity, and authority on earth were engaged in their support. Yet a few unarmed, obscure, unlettered men, by preaching a crucified and risen Saviour, in the midst of persecution and sufferings, established Christianity on an

[1] Luke xxi. 24.

immovable basis; and their successors following their example, so wonderfully prevailed, that at length Judaism and Paganism, fell before them; the religion of Jesus was professed by powerful nations; and, however corrupted or despised, it subsists to this day! Whatever men may insinuate concerning the ministers of religion, it is an undeniable fact, that plain preaching, fervent prayers, holy lives, and patient sufferings were the only weapons that the primitive preachers of the gospel opposed to all the authority and learning of the world, which were resolutely employed against them: and yet they decidedly triumphed in a contest apparently so unequal! A wise man will always allow, that every effect is produced by some adequate cause: but what adequate cause of this astonishing effect can be assigned: unless we allow that Christianity was of God, and man could not overthrow it, or prevent its success and triumph? I will only add, that every instance which at this day occurs of notoriously wicked persons converted by the preaching of the gospel from their evil ways, and afterwards walking in newness of life, constitutes a proof that Christ is risen: that he has "all power in heaven and earth," and is efficaciously present with his faithful servants, "always even to the end of the world."

We may now I trust confidently say, that no other past event was ever proved by such an accumulated body of evidence. Who doubts whether Alexander conquered Darius? or Julius Cæsar, Pompey? Yet who can produce the tenth part of the proof in respect of these facts, which

has even at this time been stated of our Lord's resurrection? But men can believe that Alexander conquered Darius, without either parting with their sins, or feeling uneasiness of conscience: while the truth of the gospel is very alarming to all who "walk according to the course of the "world," and neglect the salvation of Christ.

It would be difficult to find out any satisfactory method, of further attesting the Redeemer's resurrection, which could have possibly been devised. For, had he openly appeared to the whole Jewish people; and had they with one accord embraced Christianity; the gentiles would naturally have considered it as a concerted plan to aggrandize the nation: and had the Jews, through excessive pride and prejudice, still persisted in unbelief and opposition; the gospel would have laboured under additional disadvantages in other countries: and future ages could at last have had no other human testimony than that of the individuals whose writings should have been transmitted to them.—In short, should the Lord grant the presumptuous demand of those who refuse to believe without the testimony of their own senses; and should the Saviour appear to every individual through successive generations; how could men *be sure* that this was the identical person crucified on mount Calvary? or how *demonstrate* that the transient vision was not an illusion? Universal uncertainty and doubt must therefore be the consequence of rejecting such unanswerable and multiplied evidences, as the Lord has mercifully vouchsafed us, of that great event which we this day commemorate.

II. We proceed to shew what inferences may be deduced from the subject before us.

It would be the grossest inconsistency, and the most absurd trifling, to contend earnestly that Christ is risen, and then overlook or deny the peculiar doctrines which his resurrection was intended to authenticate. We infer therefore from our subject that Jesus is indeed the Son of God, "One with the Father," "God manifest in the "flesh." On account of various expressions which he used in speaking of himself, he was charged with blasphemy, and with making himself "equal "with God." For this crime he was condemned by Caiaphas and the Jewish council; who said before the Roman governor, "We have a law, "and by our law he ought to die, because he "made himself the Son of God."[1] The centurion who attended his crucifixion could not but know for what crime he suffered: when therefore he witnessed the miracles which accompanied his death, he cried, "Certainly this was a righteous "person!"—"Truly this was the Son of God!"[2] When incredulous Thomas was at length convinced that Christ was risen from the dead, all that he had before heard, seen, believed, or hoped, seems at once to have rushed into his mind; and he exclaimed in adoration, "My Lord, and my "God!"—Thus was Jesus "declared to be the "Son of God with power, by the resurrection "from the dead." He was demonstrated to be the promised Messiah, the Seed of the woman, the Seed of Abraham, the Son of David, Emmanuel,

[1] John xix. 7. [2] Luke xxiii. 47; Matt. xxvii. 54.

"the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the "Prince of peace," "JEHOVAH our Righteous-"ness;" and whatever the prophets from the beginning had spoken concerning the expected glorious Rédeemer. All that he had spoken of himself was likewise thus fully proved to be true: it now was manifest that he was warranted to say, "I and my Father are One:" "He that hath seen "me hath seen the Father:" "Before Abraham "was I AM:" "I am the Way, and the Truth, "and the Life: no man cometh to the Father but "by me:" "No man knoweth the Father but "the Son, and he to whom the Son shall reveal "him:" "I am the Light of the world:" "I am "the Resurrection and the Life:" "If any man "thirst let him come unto me and drink:" "The "Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all "judgment to the Son; that all men should ho-"nour the Son, even as they honour the Father. "He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not "the Father that sent him."—In short the resurrection of Christ not only demonstrates the truth of Christianity, but the infallible certainty of all its doctrines, and authenticates the whole scripture as *divinely inspired.* His testimony proves it in respect of the Old Testament; and the New was written by his chosen witnesses, and attested by all the miracles which they wrought in his name. So that the Lord now speaks to us in every part of scripture, as far as it respects our dispensation and suits our case, with as much authority as he did to Israel from mount Sinai; but with words of mercy and grace, instead of terror and dismay.

For if Christ be risen from the dead, then is his atonement accepted. "He died for our sins and "rose again for our justification." He was, as it were, arrested for our debt, and cast into the prison of the grave: but, as full payment had been made, he was speedily liberated. 'Having over-'come the sharpness of death, he hath opened the 'kingdom of heaven to all believers.' The foundation of our hopes is now surely laid: the way of access to a throne of grace is now made manifest: for the risen Saviour is also ascended into the heavens to appear in the presence of God for us; and "he is able to save to the uttermost all them "that come to God by him, seeing he ever liveth "to make intercession for them."

The resurrection of Christ assures us, that "all "power in heaven and earth is given to him;" and that "he is made Head over all things to his "church." "He both died, and rose again, and "revived, that he might be the Lord both of the "dead and the living," "Angels, principalities, "and powers are made subject to him:". "he has "the keys of death and hell:" "He is King of "kings and Lord of lords:" all nature obeys him: all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are laid up in him: he has unsearchable riches and invincible power: the fulness of the Spirit resides in him: "All the fulness of the Godhead dwelleth "in him bodily:" "He is become the Author of "eternal salvation to all them that obey him:" and "he must reign till all his enemies are made "his footstool."—It is therefore no light matter that we are considering. "Yet," saith JEHOVAH, "I have set my King upon my holy hill of Zion.—

"Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish." Every individual must either bow to the sceptre of his grace, or be broken in pieces by the iron rod of his omnipotent indignation.[1]

We are also taught that true Christians are conformed to Christ in his death, resurrection, and ascension. By motives and grace derived from their crucified and risen Redeemer, they die to their former hopes, pleasures, and pursuits: their sensibility to temporal things is deadened: carnal self-love, the main-spring of their activity in past times, is broken: "they are crucified with Christ; "nevertheless they live; yet not they, but Christ "liveth in them:" they "know him and the "power of his resurrection:" new principles, feelings, and actuating motives are communicated: "they account themselves dead indeed unto sin, "but alive unto God: "They live no longer to "themselves, but to him that died for them and "rose again:" "they are risen with Christ, and "seek those things which are above:" "their "conversation is in heaven;" and, in proportion to the degree of their faith and grace, they ascend and reign with Christ, in the nature of their joys and the temper of their hearts. Thus they are prepared, whenever they leave this world, to share that "fulness of joy, and those pleasures, which "are at God's right hand for evermore."

As our risen Redeemer ever liveth and reigneth in heaven, to manage all the concerns of his people, and make all ready for their reception; we may adopt with exulting joy the apostle's

[1] 2 Thess. i. 8—10.

words: "If when we were enemies we were re-
"conciled to God by the death of his Son; much
"more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his
"life."[1] "Who shall lay any thing to the charge
"of God's elect? it is God that justifieth, who is
"he that condemneth? it is Christ that died, yea,
"rather, is risen again; who is even at the right
"hand of God; who also maketh intercession for
"us.—Who shall separate us from the love of
"Christ?"[2] Surely our Friend, who died, and rose again for us, will take care "that none shall
"pluck us out of his hands," and will come at death to "receive us to himself, that where he is
"there we may be also."

Finally, as Christ is risen from the dead, he "is
"become the first-fruits of them that slept."—
"The hour cometh, when all that are in the graves
"shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they
"that have done good to the resurrection of life,
"and they that have done evil to the resurrection
"of damnation." At that awful period, he will ascend his tribunal, finally to separate his people from his enemies: and "these shall go away into
"everlasting punishment, but the righteous into
"life eternal." The bodies of the wicked will be rendered incorruptible, and capable of enduring the vengeance reserved for them, "where their
"worm dieth not, and their fire is not quenched;"[3] and those of the righteous will be raised spiritual and immortal, and fitted to participate the holy joys of heaven. "The Saviour, the Lord Jesus,

[1] Rom. v. 10. [2] Rom. viii. 33—35.
[3] Mark ix. 48—50.

"shall change our vile body, that it may be "fashioned like unto his glorious body, according "to the working whereby he is able even to sub- "due all things unto himself."[1] In this prospect, the believer, when strong in faith, may adopt the apostle's words and say, "O death, where is thy "sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The "sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is "the law: but thanks be to God, who giveth us "the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

III. We conclude with a few hints by way of application.

It may be useful, especially to young persons, to contemplate the prevailing scepticism and infidelity of the age, in connexion with the subject we have been considering. God hath vouchsafed us a revelation of himself, and of his will concerning us, authenticated in the most unanswerable manner, most beneficial in its nature and tendency, and exactly suited to our circumstances: yet this revelation is opposed, reviled, or ridiculed, by numbers who pretend to *virtue*; and affirm that unbelief, *at most*, can only be a harmless error, neither very criminal nor dangerous. But the scripture speaks a very different language. We read of "an evil heart of unbelief, in departing "from the living God." Our Lord says, "How "can ye believe who seek honour one of another?" "Light is come into the world, and men love "darkness rather than light, because their deeds "are evil." Unbelief therefore is the offspring of ambition, love of sin, and dislike to God and ho-

[1] Phil. iii. 20, 21.

liness. It rejects the remedy which everlasting wisdom and mercy have provided for our miseries; it "makes God a liar;" it despises his grace, and defies his power and justice; and is therefore inseparably connected with eternal damnation. "Let "no man deceive you with vain words." Men oppose the scripture because it opposes their favourite pursuits; and denounces an awful sentence against all who do not humbly repent, believe the gospel, and become the faithful subjects of the holy Jesus. They do not in reality need more evidence; but a more unprejudiced, teachable, and spiritual mind. "If they believe not "Moses and the prophets," or the apostles and evangelists; "neither would they be persuaded "though one rose from the dead." Beseech the Lord therefore to remove from you 'all hardness 'of heart, and contempt of his word and com-'mandment;' "to open your understandings that "you may understand the scriptures;" and to "give you repentance to the acknowledging of "the truth; that you may recover yourselves out "of the snare of the devil, who takes sinners cap-"tive at his will."

But beware also of a dead faith; which may keep men in the way of instruction, but is wholly unavailing to salvation. The faith demanded by our Lord is a living active principle: it receives him for all those purposes which he came into the world to effect; it applies to him, depends on him, and follows his directions: and, "working by "love," "purifying the heart," and "overcoming "the world," it produces unreserved obedience to

Christ, and careful imitation of his most perfect example.

The subject before us is peculiarly suited to the burdened conscience and desponding heart of those, who are "poor and of a contrite spirit, and "tremble at God's word." Did the Son of God so love and pity proud obstinate rebels and enemies, as to give himself a sacrifice on the cross for their sins? And will he now, on his glorious throne, refuse to stretch forth his powerful arm, to rescue the humble penitent who earnestly supplicates his mercy? No, my brethren, he delights to save. Come to him, wait on him, wait in the use of the appointed means, and you shall soon know the power of his resurrection, the depth of his condescension, and the riches of his grace.

But if we have "tasted that the Lord is gra-"cious," and can rejoice in having such a Representative and Advocate, to manage our concerns in heaven; let us remember that we are honoured to be his representatives on earth; to shew the excellency of his religion by our example; to be useful to his redeemed people, and to promote his cause in the world. Let us then ask ourselves whether Paul, when constrained by the love of Christ, would have declined any service, as too mean, laborious, self-denying, expensive, or perilous, which the command and honour of his Lord called him to perform? And whether he would not have more fully improved even *our* talents and advantages, than we have hitherto done? Let us review our conduct, and consider what ability or opportunity we have of honouring

Christ among men; let us reflect on our obligations and prospects; and see to it that "our lights "be burning and our loins girded," that when he cometh we may be found watching, and employed in a proper manner.—And "may the God of "peace, who brought again from the dead the "great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood "of the everlasting covenant, make us perfect in "every good work to do his will; working in us "that which is well-pleasing in his sight through "Jesus Christ. To whom be glory for ever and "ever. Amen."

SERMON XIX.[1]

ISAIAH XXXII. 15.

Until the Spirit be poured upon us from on high!

In the beginning of this chapter, the evangelical prophet foretels the auspicious advent and benign government of the Messiah; perhaps with some reference to Hezekiah's equitable and prosperous reign over Judah. He then denounces sentence on the careless, obstinate, and unbelieving Jews, in language aptly descriptive of their condition ever since the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans: and then he declares, that these desolations would endure, "until the Spirit should be "poured upon them from on high;" the happy effects of which gracious dispensation he predicts in the most energetic language. This seems to be the prophetical meaning of the chapter; the concluding verses of which have not hitherto received their accomplishment.—But the present occasion fixes our attention to the words of the text: and I shall endeavour from them,

I. To explain what is meant by "the pouring "out of the Spirit from on high:"

II. To consider more particularly the nature and effects of this promised blessing:

[1] Preached on Whitsunday, 1794.

III. To make some remarks on the emphatical word, "Until:"

IV. To point out some instructions more immediately arising from the subject.

I. I would explain the words here used.

The apostle calls Christianity "the ministration "of the Spirit:"[1] and it is certain however it may be overlooked, that the promise of the Spirit pervades the New Testament, in the same manner as that of a Messiah does the old. The language used concerning this subject, evidently implies the Personality and Deity of the Holy Spirit. He is represented as *hearing, speaking, willing, commanding, forbidding,* and as *receiving* and *executing a commission:* and this not in allegories and parables, but in histories, didactic discussions, laws and grants, where precision is indispensably necessary, and a literal interpretation peculiarly suitable; yet beyond all doubt these are *personal* actions. At the same time divine perfections and operations are ascribed to him. He is said to dwell in the hearts of all believers, as in his temple, to "search "the deep things of God," to raise the dead and to effect a new creation.—He is called, "the Spirit "of holiness," "the Spirit of truth," "the Spirit "of life," "the Spirit of power," "the Spirit of "wisdom and knowledge," "the eternal Spirit," and "the Comforter." If then the Holy Spirit be a Person possessing divine perfections, and performing divine operations; and if the same be true of the Father, and of the Son also; then the ancient doctrine of the Trinity is evidently scriptural,

[1] 2 Cor. iii. 8

though we can neither explain nor comprehend so deep a mystery.

If we further examine the subject, we shall find that the scriptures uniformly ascribe all miraculous powers, prophecy, and inspiration to the immediate agency of the Holy Spirit: so that the wonderful works of Christ himself, and the exercise of his mediatorial offices on earth, are spoken of as performed by his anointing: "The Holy Ghost "was not given by measure unto him."[1] And St. Paul particularly describes the diversity of gifts communicated "by the same Spirit, dividing to "every man severally as he willed."[2] The predictions of the prophets concerning "the pouring "out of the Spirit," in the days of the Messiah,[3] as well as our Lord's promises to his disciples, may have a special reference to these extraordinary gifts and powers; and to that display of the ascended Redeemer's glory and majesty, which was made on the day of Pentecost: but it should also be noted, that effects were produced, at that important season, by the same divine Agent, which were far more valuable to those by whom they were experienced.

If we accurately study the language of the sacred oracles, we shall be convinced that the Holy Spirit is there spoken of as the immediate Author of all that is holy and excellent in man: and that a spiritual death, and a total incapacity of delighting in God and heavenly things, universally prevail in the human heart, till "the law of the

[1] John iii. 34. Acts i. 2. x. 38. [2] 1 Cor. xii.
[3] Isa. xliv. 3. Joel ii. 28.

"Spirit of life in Christ Jesus makes us free from "the law of sin and death." "Except a man be "born again—born of water and of the Spirit, he "cannot see—he cannot enter into, the kingdom "of God." He is "the Spirit of wisdom and "revelation in the knowledge of God, to enlighten "the eyes of our understanding, that we may "know the hope of our calling."[1] He "con- "vinces the world of sin, of righteousness, and of "judgment:" "he glorifies Christ, for he receives "of his, and shews it unto us." It is his office to "teach us all things, and to lead us into all "truth." Christians are "elect according to the "foreknowledge of God, through sanctification of "the Spirit unto obedience:" they abound in hope "through the power of the Holy Ghost." "They "pray *in* and *by* the Holy Ghost, who helps their "infirmities:" "they are led by the Spirit," and all their holy tempers and actions are "the fruits "of the Spirit." So that, "if any man have not "the Spirit of Christ he is none of his:" for all his redeemed people are "sealed by the Spirit who "is the earnest of their inheritance:" as "the "Spirit of adoption, he witnesses with their spirits "that they are the children of God:" and thus he becomes their all-sufficient Comforter; "for the "kingdom of God is—in righteousness, and peace, "and joy in the Holy Ghost."

In these respects we are warranted to expect the pouring out of the Spirit on our souls and congregations: and we are confident that all true Christians are "the temple of the Holy Ghost, an

[1] Eph. i. 17, 18.

"habitation of God through the Spirit;" and we are amazed that any man, who calls himself a disciple of Christ, should be so ignorant, as to deny this fundamental truth of the gospel, or so profane as to turn it into ridicule! "If ye," says our Lord, "being evil, know how to give good "gifts unto your children, how much more shall "your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to "them that ask him?"[1] This accords to the promise of the Lord by his prophet, "I will put my "Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my "statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments and "do them."[2]

Far be it from us to affect equality with prophets and apostles: nor do we expect any new revelations: for the scriptures soberly interpreted are the standard of truth. But we profess to depend on the Holy Spirit to enable us properly to understand them. We have no other rule of duty than the commandments of God: but we need the promised teaching and assistance of the Holy Spirit to enable us to understand this rule, to convince us of our manifold deviations from it, to humble and soften our hearts in true repentance, to encourage our hope of mercy, and to help us to apply for it, and to strengthen us for renewed obedience. We do not pretend to know that our sins are pardoned, except as we are conscious that we hate and abhor them, and humbly trust in Christ to deliver us from them. We infer our interest in the love of God as our heavenly Father, from our love to him as his adopted children; and

[1] Luke xi. 13. [2] Ezek. xxxvi. 25, 26.

from an habitual desire of living to his glory, obeying his commandments, and doing good to our brethren for his sake.

Surely no man, who professes to reverence the scriptures will call this enthusiasm! We disclaim all pretensions to predict future events, or to discover things unknown to others by an immediate revelation from God; yea, we protest against them as derogatory to the holy scriptures and a disgrace to the gospel: and even the incautious language of some well-meaning persons meets with decided disapprobation from others, who hold most of the same doctrines; because it is capable of being perverted or misunderstood.

These remarks having been premised, I observe that, as all spiritual religion is produced by the influences of the Holy Spirit, and every degree of success attending the gospel of Christ must be ascribed to a few drops, as it were, of this fertilizing rain; so, there are seasons in which the Spirit is "poured" from on high, in copious showers, upon some favoured spots of the Lord's vineyard. This was most remarkably the case on the day of Pentecost, and for a considerable time afterwards: and, though the effects were gradually diminished, yet neither the communication of miraculous gifts, nor the abundant converting and sanctifying influences accompanying the preaching of the gospel, ceased, till perhaps more than two centuries afterwards. Such an outpouring of the Spirit attended the labours of the reformers, in the time of Luther, and for many years after his death. Nor has our land been left wholly destitute of this special benefit during the present century: and some

places seem yet to be favoured with it in a considerable degree. In short, they who are conversant with the records of the church, ancient or modern, will recollect various seasons, when, in different places, the Spirit of God was poured upon his people from on high: and all these should be considered as earnests of more abundant blessings, when the fulness of the gentiles shall be brought into the church; and the Jews "shall look to him "whom they have pierced," uniting penitent tears with believing supplications.[1]

II. We proceed to consider more particularly the nature and effects of this promised blessing.

In order to elucidate the subject, we must advert to the present state of the church and of the world. If we look among the constituted ministers of religion, we cannot but perceive that vast numbers consider their profession, in great measure, as a secular employment, and pursue their worldly interests by it, like other orders in the community; without any proportionable earnestness in seeking the salvation of souls, and the advancement of genuine Christianity. Many indeed are very learned and ingenious: but, alas! they embrace and contend for doctrines, which certainly were deduced from a very different source than the sacred scriptures. Others preach several of the great truths of the gospel, but seem little concerned to apply them to the hearts and consciences of mankind; or to excite them, by fervent exhortions and a bright example, to "adorn the doc-"trine of God our Saviour in all things." A few

[1] Zech. xii. 10—14.

indeed appear to be honestly and simply engaged in the most useful work of their sacred function: yet perhaps the skilfulness, boldness, self-denial, diligence, zeal, and faithfulness, even of this remnant, fall much beneath the degree which "men "of like passions" have at more favoured seasons been known to display.

These things should not be considered as a censure of modern times; for the case has been nearly the same in almost every age and part of the church. No external appointment to the ministry no engagement or mode of worship, can, by its own efficacy, dethrone the selfishness of the human heart, or induce the carnally-minded to act from pure motives, and to delight in the spiritual service of the Redeemer. But, when "the Spirit shall "be poured upon us from on high," we may expect that such ministers, as have feebly sought the glory of God in the salvation of souls, will feel their hearts enlarged with more abundant zeal and love; and that a vast accession will be made to their wisdom, and knowledge of Christ and his holy doctrine. They will probably be to a great degree delivered from the fear of men; raised above the love of the world; emancipated from a bigoted regard to systems and parties; filled with most tender compassion to perishing sinners, and fervent love to their brethren; occupied with realizing views of eternal things; prepared for perilous and self-denying services; and disposed cordially to unite with their fellow-labourers in promoting the common cause; without regard to competition, personal interest, or reputation.

Those who have preached the truths of the gos-

pel without application or animation will then probably feel and insist upon their practical tendency, and manifest it in their own conduct. Some who have been adverse to the truth will be won over to preach the faith which once they opposed: loiterers and hirelings will be converted into faithful, diligent, able, and disinterested pastors: many labourers will be sent forth into the vineyard; and every one who partakes of these fertilizing showers will "take heed to the ministry "which he hath received of the Lord, that he "fulfil it."

The change which took place, even in the apostles themselves, after the descent of the Holy Ghost, with the conduct of the primitive ministers of the gospel, and the exhortations addressed to them in the New Testament, abundantly warrant these expectations.

If we next survey the mass of people called Christians, and observe their disposition and conduct; we shall readily understand what effects would be produced by the pouring out of the Spirit upon us. Let us, for instance, consider the inhabitants of this city, and their behaviour in respect of the Lord's day, of public worship, and of the preaching of the gospel. We shall in this review see cause to lament that vast multitudes retire into the country for irreligious recreation, or employ the holy sabbath in travelling; that crowds assemble in places of intemperate indulgence, or frivolous amusement; and that many spend part of the day in adjusting some worldly business, and the residue in sloth or festivity. A few, compared with the whole immense number,

attend at the several places of public worship; the majority of whom, it is to be feared, having paid their weekly tribute, think no more about it; being "as a man who dreameth that he eateth, but he "awaketh, and his soul is empty." Others frequent the places where the word of God is preached, with considerable regularity: but continue "hearers only, and not doers." In short, few comparatively seem to receive the "gospel not "as the word of man, but as the word of God, "which effectually worketh in them that believe;" or "to worship him in spirit and truth:" and even these see cause to lament their want of zeal and fervency; and too often manifest languor and a defect of earnestness and activity, where the glory of God and the benefit of mankind are concerned.

But, if "the Spirit were poured upon us from on "high," the hearts of such persons would expand with holy affections, and be filled with divine consolations. They would become fervent in every religious duty, and earnest in prayer for their ministers and brethren, and for a blessing on every attempt to propagate the gospel; they would bestow pains to impress the instructions of scripture on the minds of their children, relatives, and servants; to recommend the truth by their example, and to enforce it in their conversation: they would say to those with whom they had any influence, "Come ye, and let us go to the house of God, and "he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in "his paths."[1] And, as Andrew brought Peter, and Philip Nathanael, to an acquaintance with Christ;

[1] Isa. ii. 3.

they would endeavour, by letters, books, and all other means in their power, to lead such as had been unacquainted with the gospel, to the knowledge of "the truth as it is in Jesus," and into the way of life and salvation.

At such a season formal worshippers would find their hearts engaged, in a new manner, to attend on the ordinances of God: and many of them would become true believers. Those who had imbibed false doctrines, would perceive that God was of a truth present in our congregations, and be induced to join themselves to us: a general attention and inquiry would be raised; and "the Lord would "daily add unto the church such as should be "saved."

In this manner it has frequently been known that great multitudes, through large districts, have in a short time been brought "to consider their "ways:" the veil that hides God and eternal things from men's minds has been apparently rent; and more has been done in bringing men to receive the gospel and "to walk in newness of life," during a few months, than the very same ministers had been able to accomplish in the course of many preceding years. These effects are also proved to be genuine by their permanency, and by the holy lives of numbers, after the first vehement affections and remarkable circumstances of such revivals have ceased. Thus the thousands that were converted, when the Spirit was poured out on the day of Pentecost, "continued stedfastly in the "apostles' doctrine and fellowship;" they "were "of one heart," they "had all things in common," and "great grace was upon them all." But, when

a religious commotion arises from enthusiasm, false principles, and selfish affections; it often leaves men more immoral and ungodly than they were before.

Again, if we consider the more pious part of our congregations; how often have we reason to lament that there is no more union and affection among them! and that they are kept at so great a distance from each other by their stations in life, their different employments, talents and dispositions; or even by trivial resentments, suspicions, and prejudices! But the blessing of which we speak would deliver Christians from such contracted and selfish passions; and they would be ready, without hesitation, cordially to forgive all who had offended them, to make concessions and amends to those whom they had injured, and to seek reconciliation with every one who had been in any respect alienated from them. An increase of divine illumination and brotherly love would terminate or moderate our differences of opinion; men would less regard the trivial disparity of outward rank, except as it reminded them of their several duties; they would readily unite in social worship and profitable conversation; and, in proportion as these sacred influences rested on their souls, they would abound in self-denying beneficence, and in active endeavours to supply the wants of the indigent, to soothe the anguish of the afflicted, and to alleviate the miseries of mankind. An attentive meditation on the apostolical exhortations, and the conduct of the primitive Christians, may suffice to convince us, that these must be the effects of the pouring out of the Spirit upon

any congregation, city, or country: for indeed "the fruits of the Spirit are love, joy, peace, long-"suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, "and temperance."

Should we advert to the state of religion more at large, we should find that the remnant which professes the leading truths of Christianity, and appears to be influenced by them, is lamentably divided into parties, about subordinate points of doctrine, or matters of discipline and government. So that, if we could collect together the whole company of real believers, we should find them very discordant in their sentiments, and disposed to magnify the importance of their several particularities: and it would be extremely difficult, if not wholly impossible, to unite them in religious services, or in the same plan for promoting the common cause. On the contrary, it would hardly be practicable to exclude subjects of doubtful disputation; or to prevent such contests and mutual censures as only serve to furnish the enemies of the gospel with plausible objections. Alas, this is an evident proof, that, as the apostle expresses it, we "are yet carnal,"[1] however orthodox our creed may be, or how zealously soever we contend for it! "Hereby," says our Lord, "shall all men "know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love "one for another."

But, when "the Spirit shall be poured upon us "from on high," all "who love the Lord Jesus in "sincerity" will "love one another with a pure "heart fervently." The pride and selfish passions

[1] 1 Cor. iii. 3, 4.

which occasion disputes will be mortified; the minds of Christians will be more fully illuminated; the harmony of scripture will be better understood; the comparative value of every part of religion will be more clearly ascertained; and men will be rendered more humbly sensible of their fallibility, and more disposed to candour and patience. Thus, while a most desirable progress will be made, in regulating every thing according to the standard of truth, Christians will be delivered in great measure from the propensity to judge or despise their brethren; and will learn to "receive one another, "even as Christ receiveth them, to the glory of "God." The pouring out of the Spirit will effect what acts of uniformity, conciliatory schemes, or philosophical candour can never accomplish: for it will bring Christians, through whole countries, "with one mind and one mouth to glorify God;" to form one Church, professing the same fundamental doctrines, harmoniously joining in the same worship, and the celebration of the same ordinances, and zealously concurring to promote the conversion of Mohammedans, Jews, and Pagans, to scriptural Christianity.

These happy effects are predicted by the prophets, under various significant representations; of which it may suffice at present to produce a single specimen. "The wolf shall dwell with the "lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the "kid; and the calf, and the young lion, and the "fatling together; and a little child shall lead "them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; "their young ones shall lie down together; and "the lion shall eat straw like the ox: and the

" sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, " and the weaned child shall put his hand on the " cockatrice' den. They shall not hurt nor de- " stroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth " shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as " the waters cover the sea."[1]

These are some of the effects which will proportionably follow, whenever the Spirit is poured out upon the church. Many others might be mentioned, did brevity permit; and some of them will come before us in the subsequent part of the subject.

III. Then we proceed to make some remarks on the emphatical word, " Until."

A variety of plans are continually proposed and adopted, to ameliorate the condition of mankind, and to guard at the same time against tyranny in the rulers, and turbulency in the multitude. No doubt something may be done in this way to render the state of the world more tolerable than it would otherwise be: for, while civil government in general is " God's ordinance," the peculiar arrangement of it is left in great measure to human prudence; and it may therefore be also called " the " ordinance of man."[2] But too sanguine expectations are formed, when changes take place, or when supposed improvements are made; and speedy disappointment is the consequence. The world after all remains full of oppression or sedition: the rulers and people generally continue unchanged in character, whatever external changes take place: and selfishness produces its effects,

[1] Isai. xi. 6—9. xli. 18—20. xliv. 3—5.
[2] Rom. xiii. 2. 1 Pet. ii. 13.

after all the efforts which are made to counteract it; even as poison retains its destructive efficacy, in whatever form it is administered. This will in great measure continue to be the case, "until the "Spirit be poured upon us from on high," to renew men's hearts to the divine image in holy love: and then, they will delight in equity, goodness, mercy, and peace, after the example of our holy God; which will render human society as happy, as it is now too often miserable.

Again, the earth hath in every age been a field of blood; and the vast proportion of our race, which has perished by the sword, almost exceeds credibility or calculation: nor can the compassionate mind reflect on the subject without horror and amazement. The causes of this deplorable fact have been sought for in the different forms of government; and in the ambition of men distinguished by certain titles, or invested with authority in some peculiar manner. Yet the disposition "to delight in war" seems to have been common to governors of all descriptions: and the sacred writers, characterizing the ungodly, say, "Their "feet are swift to shed blood." Universal history is the best comment on this text: all the genius of mankind, however diversified, has combined to celebrate successful warriors. The original murderer has appeared in this respect especially to be the god of this world: Mars, Bellona, and even Minerva, (the poet's emblem of prudence in war,) are the names under which polite nations have worshipped him: and unnumbered millions of human victims have been immolated at his shrine, by his renowned priests, who have emulated his

strate that this has always in process of time been the consequence, when persons have argued themselves and others out of the ancient and orthodox interpretation of redemption by the Saviour's atoning blood.

But the present occasion admits not a fuller discussion of this important subject. The propitiatory oblation made by the Lamb of God, being of infinite value, was sufficient to take away the original and actual sin of mankind, even as if it had been but one complex transgression. Millions in every age have received the benefit of it; and, if the whole human race should at once apply for pardon and salvation by the blood of Christ, it would suffice to take away all their sin. The efficacy of the typical sacrifices was confined wholly to the Jewish nation: but that of the one atoning sacrifice of Christ extends equally to other nations. It is sent to them all without exception; and we can assure any sinner throughout the earth, that if he believe in the Son of God he shall be saved. So that none perish because there is no help for them; but because pride, love of sin, and aversion to the spiritual service of God, harden their hearts in unbelief, and they "will not come to Christ "that they might have life. In this sense "the "Lamb of God taketh away the sin of the world."

But he also taketh away guilt from the conscience by the *sprinkling* of his blood.[1] The atonement made upon the cross eventually profits none but those who apply it to themselves. This is represented in the Lord's supper, as it was of old by

[1] 1 Pet. i. 2.

the eating of the paschal lamb, with the sprinkling of its blood. We are not communicants merely by hearing of, or seeing, the emblems of Christ's body and blood, but by eating and drinking them. The Lord Jesus "who gave himself a ransom for "all, to be testified in due time,"[1] sends his gospel to sinners, and by the powerful convictions of the Holy Spirit effectually destroys their self-confidence; then their conscience becomes burthened with the guilt of their former sins; and, whatever efforts they use to get relief, all prove ineffectual, till they understand the nature, and see the suitableness and glory of redemption by the blood of Christ. Applying in true repentance and living faith for an interest in this propitiation, they find the load of guilt removed, and obtain stable peace, connected with deep humiliation, hatred of sin, watchfulness against it, acquaintance with the divine law in their own hearts, and great tenderness of conscience. "For, if the blood of bulls and of "goats, and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling the "unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh; "how much more shall the blood of Christ, who "through the eternal Spirit offered himself with-"out spot to God, purge your conscience from "dead works to serve the living God."[2] Nothing but this view of the cross, this application to "the "blood of sprinkling," this washing in "the foun-"tain opened for sin and uncleanness," can give that kind of peace and confidence which hath been described: because nothing else can shew the enlightened and humbled heart the divine justice

[1] 1 Tim. ii. 5, 6. [2] Heb. ix. 13, 14. x. 22.

and holiness, in harmony with mercy and truth, glorified in pardoning and saving the chief of sinners. And, whenever this peace has been lost through relapses into sin, there is no other way of recovering it but that in which it was first obtained: nay, indeed, it cannot be preserved in the midst of those numberless imperfections and defilements that accompany our best days and duties, except by continual application to "the blood of "Christ which cleanseth from all sin."

In consequence of the atonement and intercession of Christ, the power of the Holy Spirit destroys in the heart of his disciples, the dominion, love, and pollution of sin; by means of the motives, encouragements, and ordinances of the gospel. In this sense also, "the Lamb of God taketh "away the sin of the world:" for this is the only method by which the hearts of men, all over the world, can be made holy; and all men in every nation of the earth, who believe in the name of Christ, are thus "sanctified by faith in him."[1]— "Christ also loved the church, and gave himself "for it, that he might sanctify and cleanse it with "the washing of water by the word; that he might "present it to himself a glorious church, not hav- "ing spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that "it should be holy and without blemish."[2] "You, "who were—enemies in your minds by wicked "works, yet now hath he reconciled; in the body "of his flesh through death; to present you holy, "and unblamable, and unreprovable in his sight."[3] "He gave himself for us, that he might redeem

[1] Acts xxvi. 18. [2] Eph. v. 25—27. [3] Col. i. 21, 22.

" us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a " peculiar people, zealous of good works."[1] Thus will the Lamb of God continue to take away the sin of believers all over the world, till there be no remains of it left; and till the whole company shall be " presented faultless before the presence of his " glory with exceeding joy."[2]

III. Then we consider the call to " behold the " Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the " world."

I shall not confine myself to the exact import of the words as spoken by John, but refer likewise to several other scriptures of a similar nature. " There " is no God else beside me, a just God and a Sa- " viour;—look unto me and be ye saved, all the " ends of the earth."[3] " As Moses lifted up the " serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son " of man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth in " him should not perish, but have eternal life."[4] " Looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of " our faith, who for the joy set before him endured " the cross, despising the shame: and is set down " at the right hand of the throne of God."[5] The Baptist may be supposed to have addressed his disciples to this effect: 'You want pardon of your 'sins, and deliverance from the power and pollu- 'tion of iniquity: " Behold " then " the Lamb of " God which taketh away the sin of the world." 'He alone can confer these blessings; apply to 'him, become his disciples, rely on him entirely, 'and follow implicitly his directions: thus you will

[1] Tit. ii. 14. [2] Jude 24. [3] Isa. xlv. 21, 22.
[4] John iii. 14, 15. [5] Heb. xii. 2.

'be saved, and be made instrumental to the salva-'tion of your fellow sinners.'

But we may understand the call in a more comprehensive sense, as an exhortation to meditate seriously and frequently on the great doctrines thus revealed: to behold and contemplate the person and redemption of Christ with fixed attention and humble faith. He seems to address us from the cross, and to say, "Is it nothing to you, all ye that "pass by? Behold, and see, if there be any sorrow "like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me: "wherewith the Lord hath afflicted me in the day "of his fierce anger."[1] Let us then turn our thoughts from all other subjects, and with believing application to ourselves, contemplate the interesting scene which we this day commemorate.

We cannot well enter on such meditations, without adverting to the language of the sacred writers concerning the essential and eternal Deity of Christ, One with the Father, the Creator and Upholder of all worlds, the Object of universal worship and adoration. We consider this glorious Person coming in the flesh to be the Saviour of the world, "to seek and save the lost," from mere love and compassion to deservedly perishing sinners. The spotless purity of his human nature; the perfection of his obedience to the divine law; the depth of his voluntary humiliation: the poverty and contempt, and "the contradiction of sinners," which he endured through life; demand our most serious attention. He effected not his gracious purposes in our behalf as a monarch or a conqueror: he taught

[1] Lam. i. 12.

not as a philosopher or a moralist: "but he took "upon him the form of a servant," and "gave his "life a ransom for many."

We should, however, especially contemplate the variety and intenseness of his sufferings in the closing scene of his humiliation: the excruciating pain he endured from the scourge, the thorns, and the nails, and when hanging on the accursed tree; with the anguish of mind he felt when agonizing in the garden, and when on the cross he exclaimed, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" It is very important for us to reflect on what the Redeemer suffered from *men*; from the base treachery of Judas, the unfaithfulness of Peter, the cowardice of the disciples; the cruel injustice of Caiaphas, the scribes, priests, council, and even their servants; from the contempt and indignity put upon him by Herod and his men of war; the cruelty and scorn of Pilate's soldiers; the lingering tortures of the cross, the ingratitude of the insulting multitude, and the revilings even of the malefactors.—We should recollect likewise that this was the hour and power of darkness: and, what gloomy imaginations and detested thoughts might be presented to the mind of Christ, by the subtle and energetic influence of *evil spirits*, may be best conceived by those "who are not ignorant of their devices." "He "suffered, being tempted, that he might be able to "succour them that are tempted:" and the assaults of Satan in the desert may convince us that he would do his utmost, when permitted, to bruise the heel of Him who came to crush his head and destroy his works.

But we are also taught, that "it pleased *the*

"*Lord* to bruise him, and to put him to grief; and "to make his soul an offering for sin." "Awake, "O sword, against my Shepherd, and against the man that is my Fellow, saith the Lord of Hosts; smite the Shepherd."[1] "He spared not his own "Son, but delivered him up for us all." And, when we compare our Lord's agony in the garden, and his exclamation on the cross, with the conduct of his own disciples under the severest tortures; we must be convinced that his cup was embittered inconceivably more than their's, and that consolations and supports were vouchsafed to them, of which he was wholly left destitute. We cannot explain this subject. We may be certain that remorse of conscience, despair, and the prevalence of hateful passions, which will eternally increase the misery of condemned sinners, could have no place in the mind of the holy Jesus: but whatever pain, shame, wrath, curse, agony, or misery, he could possibly endure; whatever the justice of God, the honour of the law, and the instruction of the universe in the evil and the desert of sin, required; all this the Redeemer suffered, till he could say with his expiring breath, "It is finished."

It should likewise be remembered that our Lord most willingly submitted to all these sufferings, from love to our souls and regard to the glory of God. "No man had power to take away his life:" the prince of this world had no part in him; no personal transgression exposed him to the sentence of death; but "love, that passeth knowledge," moved him to give himself a propitiatory sacrifice

[1] Zech. xiii. 7.

for our sins! The meekness, patience, and persevering fortitude, with which our Lord suffered, should not pass unnoticed. "He was led as a "lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before his "shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth." "Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example "that ye should follow his steps: who when he "was reviled reviled not again; when he suffered "he threatened not."[1]

The circumstances attending his crucifixion also form a proper subject of meditation. The sun was miraculously darkened, as a token of the divine displeasure, and an emblem of the gloom which overspread "the Sun of righteousness." Yet, in this deep humiliation of the Lord of glory, he rescued one perishing sinner from the jaws of destruction, and took him with him to paradise. When he expired, "the veil of the temple was rent," the rocks were torn by an earthquake, the graves were opened, and the preparation made for the resurrection of those saints who were appointed to grace the triumph of the rising and ascending Saviour. For the event of his sufferings in his personal exaltation, and in the complete salvation in body and soul, of all the unnumbered myriads, which ever did or ever shall believe in him, is the last particular to which our present meditations should be directed.—But it is time for us to proceed,

IV. To consider the peculiar instructions to be derived from these contemplations.

The worth of our immortal souls is most empha-

[1] 1 Pet. ii. 21—23.

tically taught us by the cross of Christ. "What "is a man profited if he gain the whole world and "lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in "exchange for his soul?" Could any one literally gain the whole universe, as the price of iniquity, and keep it with every imaginable advantage during the term of human life; it could neither preserve his body from the grave, nor his soul from eternal misery. "It costs more to redeem the soul: that "must be let alone for ever." View the Saviour agonizing in Gethsemane, and expiring on the cross! Did he endure these unknown sufferings to preserve men from temporal poverty, pain, or death? By no means: but to deliver them from "the wrath to come:" where "their worm dieth "not, and the fire is not quenched." Who can doubt then that an immortal soul is man's principal treasure? It is possessed by the meanest, and it infinitely exceeds in value all the distinctions of the mightiest. He who made the soul knows its worth: and he deemed it so valuable, that he ransomed our souls from ruin at the price of his own blood. Shall we not then deem the salvation of them our grand concern, and regard all interfering objects as unworthy our notice in the comparison? If we should never succeed in any one thing all our lives, except in this chief concern; our felicity will be congratulated by angels to eternity: if we should prosper in all other respects, and fail here; our folly and misery will be lamented and execrated for ever.

Our children also have immortal souls. Does then our love of them induce us to use every means of providing for their comfort in this world; and

shall it not influence us to proportionable earnestness in seeking their salvation? O cruel and infatuated parents, who take excessive care about the bodies of your children, and leave their precious souls to perish everlastingly for want of diligent instruction: or perhaps even help to murder them, by indulging their sinful dispositions, and setting them a bad example!—Nay, let us further learn to consider that our relatives, neighbours, and enemies, have immortal souls. Because they are so valuable, "he that winneth souls is wise;" let us then think nothing too much to expend or attempt, in promoting that grand object for which the Son of God shed his precious blood.

But, viewed in this glass, how vain do the world and all things in it appear! "God forbid that I "should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus "Christ; by whom the world is crucified to me, "and I unto the world." What are empires, or the loss of them? what renown, or infamy? what affluence or poverty? what the most exquisite pleasure or torturing pain, when put in competition with eternal happiness or misery? or when viewed in connexion with the cross of Christ? Had he not so loved us, all possible prosperity could not have prevented our everlasting misery: if we believe in him; all possible adversity cannot prevent our everlasting happiness. Let us not then envy the wealthy and successful, but pity and pray for them: let us not covet worldly things, repine for want of them, or lament the loss of them: let us not join in the vain mirth of condemned sinners, or be satisfied with any thing short of the joy of God's salvation.

On the other hand, we here behold the riches of the divine compassion and tender mercy towards the sinful children of men. "Herein is love, not "that we loved God, but that he loved us, and "sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." If then God so loved us when enemies, what may not those expect from him, who renounce every other plea, and "flee for refuge to lay hold on this "hope set before them?" In every penitent who supplicates mercy for the sake of Christ and his atoning blood, the Redeemer "sees of the travail "of his soul, and is satisfied." For this very purpose he suffered and died on the cross, "that he "might become the author of eternal salvation to "all them that obey him." On this ground we say, "Let the heart of them rejoice that seek the "Lord: and "if, when we were enemies, we were "reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much "more being reconciled, we shall be saved by his "life." "He that spared not his own Son, but "delivered him up for us all, how shall he not "with him freely give us all things?"

But while we mingle our tears of godly sorrow with joyful thanksgivings, and glory in Christ Jesus amidst all our tribulations; let us also, my brethren, look to the cross, and learn our obligations to the most self-denying and devoted obedience. Can we, with this object full in view, deem any expense too great, any sacrifice too costly, any cross too heavy, any labour too severe, which his glory, the authority of his command, or the benefit of his purchased flock, call us to undergo? Surely the constraining love of Christ will render every loss or suffering tolerable, yea pleasant, to the thankful believer; while he beholds

the Lamb of God expiring on the cross, to take away that sin which would otherwise have eternally ruined his soul; and to purchase for him everlasting and unutterable felicity!

Here too we must look, that we may learn patience, meekness, spirituality, and every part of that holiness to which we are called. Hence we must draw our motives and encouragements; and here we must view that perfect example, which we are required to copy. Forgiveness of injuries, love of enemies, perseverance in well-doing amidst insult, contempt, and ingratitude, and compassion to perishing sinners, are best learned by looking to the cross; by witnessing the triumph of divine love in the sufferings of Emmanuel, and hearing him mingle his dying groans with prayers for his cruel and insulting murderers.

Meditation on this subject may also convince us that we must expect tribulation in the world, and the enmity or contempt of believers, if we belong to Christ and bear his image. His wisdom, holiness, and love were perfect: yet no one of our race ever experienced such hatred and insult from all ranks, orders, and descriptions of men, as the spotless Lamb of God! Malefactors commonly meet with some pity amidst their tortures, however merited: but Jews and gentiles, rulers, scribes, priests, soldiers, and the multitude, could unite in cruel mockery of the holy Jesus, when expiring on a cross! Away then with all those flattering sentiments of human nature, which represent it as loving and delighting in genuine excellency: the cross of Christ, and the sufferings of his most faithful servants in every age, form a demonstrative confu-

tation of the proud delusion! And, if our hearts have been changed by divine grace, so that we love and imitate the lowly and humble Saviour, let us count our cost, expect scorn and hatred from men, tribulation in the world, and peace and consolation from the Lord alone. Let us also look beyond the cross, and contemplate the glory which followed; "that we may not be wearied and faint "in our minds." We too have a "joy set before "us:" let us then endure our lighter cross, and despise the shame; assured that "if we suffer with "Christ, we shall also reign with him" in glory.

But, my fellow sinners, where will you appear at his second coming to judge the world, if you now neglect his great salvation? If you join his enemies; and, by cleaving to your sins, prefer Barabbas to Jesus, sell him as Judas did for a few pieces of silver, or determine you "will not have "him to reign over you?" Still he invites you to come to him, that you may have life eternal. Oh! that you would seek to him as a Saviour, who will shortly come to be your Judge.

In fine, contemplating the cross of Christ, teaches us most effectually every lesson contained in the sacred scriptures. Let us then, my brethren, further prosecute our meditations at the Lord's table: and, while we remember the love and sufferings of our Redeemer, let us renew our repentance, and acceptance of his salvation, and give up ourselves to his service; that, "as bought with a price, we "may glorify him with our bodies and spirits "which are his."

SERMON XVIII.[1]

1 CORINTHIANS XV. 20.

Now is Christ risen from the dead.

We learn from this chapter, that some of the Corinthians had denied the doctrine of a resurrection: probably explaining away the apostolical language on that subject as figurative, and as only meaning conversion, or that change which took place in the world by the introduction of Christianity.[2] In confuting this dangerous error, the apostle called their attention to the resurrection of Christ, as an undeniable fact: and he shewed that the denial of a resurrection was equivalent to saying that Christ was not risen, and thus tended to subvert the foundation of Christianity, and to destroy the hopes and comforts of believers. "If "there be no resurrection of the dead, then is not "Christ risen: and, if Christ be not risen, then is "our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain: "yea, and we are found false witnesses of God.— "And, if Christ be not raised, ye are yet in your "sins: then they also which are fallen asleep in "Christ are perished. If in this life only we have "hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable." All the joys and supports of Christians are inseparably connected with future and eternal felicity; without the hope of which they would

[1] Preached on Easter Sunday, 1796. [2] 2 Tim. ii. 17, 18.

have nothing to counterbalance their peculiar trials and conflicts.

If Christ were not risen, believers were yet in their sins, and even the martyrs had finally perished. But were not the primitive Christians converted from idols to serve the living and true God? Did they not "repent, and do works meet for re-"pentance?" Were they not exemplary in the practice of all good works? And did they not meet death for the sake of a good conscience towards God? How then could they be "yet in their sins?" —Because none of these things could atone for their transgressions; and, if Christ were not risen, no effectual atonement had been made: they must therefore have still continued under condemnation, and exposed to the curse of the law which they had broken. A most conclusive proof that the death of Christ was a vicarious satisfaction for sin; and that none can be saved, who are not interested in that atonement!

It is deemed uncandid to charge men's doctrine with the consequences resulting from them: yet I apprehend we should all consider ourselves bound to warn people against the consequences of taking a poisonous mixture, even if he who administered it was not at all aware of its nature: and the apostle has here set us the example of doing the same, in opposing those erroneous doctrines by which immortal souls are fatally deceived.

He then adds the words of the text, "Now is "Christ risen from the dead," and proceeds to treat very copiously on the doctrine of the resurrection. But I shall confine myself to the subject before us, and attempt,

I. To prove that Christ is risén from the dead:

II. To shew the inferences which may be drawn from that event;

III. To apply the subject to ourselves.

I. I shall prove that Christ is risen.

Though true Christians have "a witness in "themselves," which in general satisfies their minds as to the certainty of the things which they have believed; yet, in peculiar seasons of temptation, an acquaintance with the evidences of Christianity would tend greatly to their establishment. And, in these times of infidelity and scepticism, all, who would "contend earnestly for the "faith once delivered to the saints," should be able "to give a reason of their hope" to every inquirer or objector: both to defend themselves from the charge of enthusiasm and credulity; to obviate the doubts of those with whom they converse; and to preserve young persons, perhaps their own children, from the fatal contagion. It is therefore greatly to be lamented that pious persons are in general so little furnished with this sort of knowledge, of which they might make such important use.

It is commonly said that the new Testament is built upon the foundation of the Old, and must stand or fall along with it: and there is a truth in this sentiment, though somewhat diverse, in its nature and consequences, from that which is generally supposed. Our Lord and his apostles have so frequently quoted the Old Testament, and almost every part of it, as "the scripture," "the word of "God," "the oracles of God," and "the language "of the Holy Ghost," that their credit must be

connected with the divine inspiration of the books thus repeatedly attested by them.—We are able to prove that the canon of the Old Testament in those days differed very little, if at all, from that which we have at present, yet our Lord referring to different parts of it says, "Thus it is written, and "thus it must be," "the scripture cannot be "broken," "the scriptures must needs be ful- "filled." And the apostles say, "All scripture is "given by inspiration of God:" "Holy men of "God spake as they were moved by the Holy "Ghost." This single consideration completely establishes the whole of the Old Testament as a divine revelation, with all those who duly reverence the words of Christ and his apostles. In all other respects the New Testament stands on its own basis, and is proved to be the word of God by distinct evidence: it affords unspeakably more support to the Old Testament than it receives from it; and the resurrection of Christ alone is sufficient to authenticate the whole sacred volume.

The restoration of a dead body to life is no more difficult to omnipotence, than the production of life at first. The divine operation is in both respects alike incomprehensible: but, as we continually observe life to be communicated in a certain way, we call that the law of nature; though we understand not our own meaning, and cannot explain how causes produce their effects. But dead bodies do not return to life in the ordinary course of human affairs: we therefore suppose some law of nature to the contrary, the violation of which in any particular instance, we should call a miracle; that is a divine interposition and operation to

produce an effect, above or contrary to the general energy of second causes. Some persons indeed pretend that this is impossible: but "why should "it be thought incredible with you, that God "should raise the dead?" The power exerted is no greater than that by which thousands of infants receive new life every day: and will man presume to say, that God cannot, or shall not, exert his power in any way which they have never before observed?—If a sufficient reason can be assigned for his extraordinary interposition, and the fact be indisputably proved; it becomes as credible as other well attested events; many of which do not coincide with our expectations or ideas of probability.

Universal history, observation, and experience prove that "the world lieth in wickedness." Idolatry, superstition, impiety, and every kind of vice and misery, have in all ages, covered and desolated the earth. But it hath pleased God, of his infinite mercy, to reveal himself to sinful men; to make known a way in which they might be reconciled to him and recovered to holiness; and thus to introduce a religion suited to rectify the disorders of the world, and to unite the honour of his name with the eternal happiness of unnumbered millions. Miracles, and the resurrection of the Redeemer especially, formed a suitable demonstration that this religion came from God; and they served to arrest the attention of mankind: for alas! sinners for the most part are too much occupied about the affairs of this life, to notice those things which relate to God and their eternal state.—These are reasons assigned for a divine interpo-

sition on this occasion; and more important cannot possibly be conceived.

The Jews, the most inveterate enemies of Christianity, preserve, with profound veneration and scrupulous care, the books of the Old Testament, which have been handed down in the same manner from generation to generation, during a long succession of ages. These books evidently contain a system of prophecy, centering in the person and redemption of the Messiah; and, among other particulars, his sufferings and death are circumstantially foretold, with clear intimations of his resurrection and subsequent glorious kingdom.[1]

We know also that the gospels were made public in the earliest ages of Christianity; for they are continually quoted and referred to by those writers whose works have been preserved: and from them we learn, that our Lord predicted his own death and resurrection on the third day, in so explicit a manner that the Jewish rulers were aware of it, and took their measures accordingly. Yet, when the body of Christ was delivered to Joseph, they were so fully satisfied, by what they saw and heard, of his being really dead, that they made no objection on that ground: but they requested Pilate that the sepulchre might be securely closed, and guarded by Roman soldiers, till the third day was past; lest the disciples should steal his body, and say that he was risen again. After all their precautions, however, the body was gone, and they were never able to shew by whom it was removed, or what became of it.

[1] Psalm ii. xvi. 8—11. Isai. liii. 10—12.

Here let us pause, that we may consider the credibility of testimony.—One consistent witness, of sound understanding and fair character, who has no apparent interest in deceiving, is often deemed sufficient to determine the sentence of life or death, the most important of all temporal concerns: but, if three or four such witnesses should agree in deposing, that they saw such a murder or robbery committed by the prisoner at the bar, no sober man could doubt of the fact, or scruple to pronounce him guilty. Now there were twelve appointed witnesses to the resurrection of Christ, of plain good understanding, and unexceptionable character: for Peter's denial of his Lord, through the force of sudden temptation, forms no impeachment of his integrity; seeing he so honestly confessed his guilt, and so fully proved the sincerity of his repentance by his subsequent conduct: and, when Judas by transgression fell, another was chosen in his place. These witnesses had constantly attended Jesus during some years, and must have been competent to know him from all other men. They were remarkably incredulous respecting his resurrection; and his crucifixion seems almost to have extinguished their hopes: how then can it be supposed that they would have attempted to overpower or deceive the vigilant and valiant Roman soldiers, and to steal the body of Jesus? In so desperate an undertaking they must have been sure to excite the combined rage of both the Jewish and the Roman rulers: and success itself could only expose them to hatred, persecution, and all kinds of hardships and sufferings. It is manifest that, from the time they

began to bear witness to the resurrection of Christ, they renounced all prospects of worldly interest, ease, or greatness; and willingly embraced poverty, labour, contempt, bonds, stripes, and perils as their portion. So that no possible account can be given of their conduct, unless it be ascribed to a principle of conscience: while the strict and exact morality of their writings demonstrates, that they could not be actuated by false principles: for they do not allow men, in any case, to do evil that good may come; and they condemn all kinds of imposition with the most decided severity. Is it then possible for human beings deliberately to choose temporal and eternal misery, and to persevere in decided adherence to a plan which, on their own principles, ensures their damnation in another world, as well as a complication of miseries in this present life?

The witnesses of our Lord's resurrection survived that event a long time; some of them nearly forty years, and John still more. They were after a while separated into different parts of the world; and seemed to have no common interest, except in the success of Christianity: they passed through a series of the severest trials, and almost all of them died martyrs in the cause: but no change of circumstances or situation, no promises or threatenings of men, no repeated tortures or impending dangers, induced one of them in the smallest degree to waver in his testimony. They declared unanimously that, on the third morning after the crucifixion, a vision of angels told some of their company, at the sepulchre, that their Lord was risen; that afterwards they all saw him repeatedly;

that they examined his hands, feet, and side, and were sure it was the same body which had been nailed to the cross; that he ate and drank with them several times; that at length, after giving them particular instructions relative to their future conduct, he ascended from among them, till a cloud intercepted their sight of him; and that two angels appearing to them declared he was gone to heaven. Such an unwavering, persevering testimony of twelve persons, whose holy lives, diligent labours, disinterestedness, and patient sufferings evince their sincerity, forms so complete a proof, that, in any other case, he who should not be satisfied with it would be deemed sceptical almost to insanity.

This is, however, but a very small part of the evidence afforded us in this most important concern.—Saul the persecutor was a man endued with superior talents cultivated by education, and possessed of peculiar advantages for rising in the world; of which he was evidently availing himself while gratifying his implacable enmity to the gospel. Yet was he, all at once, converted into a most zealous preacher of that faith which he had attempted to destroy: and, renouncing all his former principles and worldly prospects, yea, exasperating above measure his powerful patrons and employers; he spent all the remnant of his days in the most self-denying labours, hardships, and sufferings, endured with the greatest alacrity, for the sake of Christ and the gospel: and at length he sealed his testimony with his blood. How can this fact be accounted for, unless we allow the truth of his narrative concerning the manner of

his conversion? And, if that be allowed, the resurrection of Christ is demonstrated.

In the chapter whence our text is taken, this man declares, that Christ appeared after his resurrection to "above five hundred brethren at once." of whom "the greater part remained" to that time. This was an appeal to nearly three hundred living witness of that event: but no one ever attempted to disprove the truth of his assertion; though false teachers would have concurred with open enemies in such an attempt had it been practicable.

The testimony of the apostles to the resurrection of Jesus implied a charge of the most complicated wickedness against the rulers of the Jewish nation: these had the power in their hands, and were every way concerned to vindicate their characters, and punish those who thus accused them. This might readily have been done, had they produced the Roman soldiers in court, to testify that the body of Jesus had been stolen, or to state in what way it was removed from the sepulchre.

But in fact they had bribed the soldiers to circulate a self-contradictory report on this subject, which would not bear investigation: and, when St. Matthew soon afterwards charged this publicly upon them, and declared that the story was generally current among the Jews to that time; no one attempted to deny or disprove the charge! In every case of this nature silence must be construed into a confession of guilt: and, if the rulers could have accounted for the removal of the body, without either admitting the truth of Matthew's charge, or our Lord's resurrection, no doubt can reasona-

bly be made, that they would have done it in the most public manner.

Every reflecting person must perceive, that the evidence is completely satisfactory, provided it can be made clear that these books were published at the time to which they refer. To obviate therefore every doubt on that head, without engaging in an argument far too complicated for this occasion, I would inquire, at what subsequent time it could have been possible to obtain credit to writings of this description? If a manuscript, said to have been long concealed in some library, be produced or published, as the work of an eminent author, who flourished two or three centuries ago; it immediately is subjected to a severe scrutiny, and imposture in such cases seldom escapes detection. But writings which contain a circumstantial narrative of "things not done in a corner," but in the open view of mankind, during several years; and connected with an epistolary correspondence resulting from them: could never have obtained the least credit in the world, if published after the times referred to, with an express appeal to mankind, that they had all along been familiarly acquainted with them. Such an insolent attempt to persuade whole nations out of their senses and understandings must have excited universal astonishment and indignation: or, had it been possible to convince a few individuals that they had received these books from their ancestors, and been taught from infancy to revere them as the writings of the apostles, when in fact neither they nor any other persons had ever seen or heard of them; the effrontery of the deceivers, and the credulity of the

deceived must have constituted an unprecedented event, and marked the age in which it occurred. As therefore no time can be mentioned, when any attempt of this kind is so much as hinted at, by either Christian, Jewish, or Pagan historians; we might be confident that the writings in question were extant, and well known in the church, from the very period in which they are said to have been published; even had we no other evidence. But no impartial man of learning can be imposed upon by pretences of this kind; having access to abundant proof of another nature that the books of the New Testament were extant in the early ages of Christianity: and this argument is principally adduced for the benefit of those who have neither leisure nor advantages for these investigations.

We should also remember, that on the day of Pentecost, immediately following the resurrection of Christ, the Holy Spirit was poured out on the assembled apostles, with such extraordinary circumstances as drew together vast multitudes who then resided at Jerusalem. In the presence of all these witnesses they spake, fluently and correctly, in the languages of the several countries from which their hearers were collected: though it was certainly known that they had not had the opportunity of learning them: and this stupendous miracle, together with Peter's sermon on the occasion, was made effectual to the conversion of three thousand persons. The gifts of tongues, and of working miracles in the name of Jesus, were ever after continued to them, and were frequently exercised in the most public and undeniable manner, before numerous witnesses, enemies as well as friends

The same powers were likewise communicated to many others, by the laying on of the apostles' hands. The time, place, occasion, and circumstances of these extraordinary transactions are frequently specified in their writings. Thus the inhabitants of many cities and countries were appealed to; and the enemies of Christianity were challenged to disprove their pretensions. But none ever attempted to do it: for the Jews themselves do not deny that many extraordinary works were performed by Jesus and his disciples; and the way, in which they try to account for them, demonstrates that from the first their ancestors had nothing plausible to object. In this manner the witnesses and proofs of our Lord's resurrection were multiplied, in almost every part of the vast Roman empire: yea, "God also bare them witness, "both with signs and wonders, and with divers "miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost." And can any reasonable man suppose that a general belief could ever have prevailed, through whole nations, of such public and extraordinary events, without any person attempting to deny them; if they had not actually happened, and been so notorious as to be uncontrovertible?

The chosen witnesses of our Lord's resurrection were likewise the principal writers of the New Testament, and the whole was doubtless written under their inspection. Now in these books prophecies are inserted, which have been accomplishing ever since to the present day. A sceptic indeed might doubt, whether the predictions concerning the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple were not written after the event: but who can account for

other parts of the same prophecy, without allowing that the writer was divinely inspired? "The peo-"ple shall be led away captive into all nations, "and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the gen-"tiles, until the times of the gentiles be ful-"filled."[1] Has not this been actually the case with the Jews and with Jerusalem during almost eighteen hundred years? Could human sagacity have foreseen such an unparalleled series of events? Or would God have thus confirmed the testimony of impostors? And does not this prophecy, thus wonderfully accomplished, demonstrate the resurrection of Christ, and the truth of Christianity? The coming of "the man of sin," with "lying miracles," doctrines of demons," "worshipping of "angels," "prohibitions of marriage," and "com-"mands to abstain from meat;" the impositions, usurpations, and persecutions of the Roman Antichrist; with various other particulars, were most exactly and circumstantially predicted by the several witnesses of our Lord's resurrection: and the undeniable accomplishment of these prophecies are so many divine attestations to their testimony, for the satisfaction of all succeeding generations.

The Jewish ritual, or the pagan theology, was intimately connected with the foundations of the several governments then existing in the world: and all the learning, ingenuity, and authority on earth were engaged in their support. Yet a few unarmed, obscure, unlettered men, by preaching a crucified and risen Saviour, in the midst of persecution and sufferings, established Christianity on an

[1] Luke xxi. 24.

immovable basis; and their successors following their example, so wonderfully prevailed, that at length Judaism and Paganism, fell before them; the religion of Jesus was professed by powerful nations; and, however corrupted or despised, it subsists to this day! Whatever men may insinuate concerning the ministers of religion, it is an undeniable fact, that plain preaching, fervent prayers, holy lives, and patient sufferings were the only weapons that the primitive preachers of the gospel opposed to all the authority and learning of the world, which were resolutely employed against them: and yet they decidedly triumphed in a contest apparently so unequal! A wise man will always allow, that every effect is produced by some adequate cause: but what adequate cause of this astonishing effect can be assigned: unless we allow that Christianity was of God, and man could not overthrow it, or prevent its success and triumph? I will only add, that every instance which at this day occurs of notoriously wicked persons converted by the preaching of the gospel from their evil ways, and afterwards walking in newness of life, constitutes a proof that Christ is risen: that he has "all power in heaven and earth," and is efficaciously present with his faithful servants, "always even to the end of the world."

We may now I trust confidently say, that no other past event was ever proved by such an accumulated body of evidence. Who doubts whether Alexander conquered Darius? or Julius Cæsar, Pompey? Yet who can produce the tenth part of the proof in respect of these facts, which

has even at this time been stated of our Lord's resurrection? But men can believe that Alexander conquered Darius, without either parting with their sins, or feeling uneasiness of conscience: while the truth of the gospel is very alarming to all who "walk according to the course of the "world," and neglect the salvation of Christ.

It would be difficult to find out any satisfactory method, of further attesting the Redeemer's resurrection, which could have possibly been devised. For, had he openly appeared to the whole Jewish people; and had they with one accord embraced Christianity; the gentiles would naturally have considered it as a concerted plan to aggrandize the nation: and had the Jews, through excessive pride and prejudice, still persisted in unbelief and opposition; the gospel would have laboured under additional disadvantages in other countries: and future ages could at last have had no other human testimony than that of the individuals whose writings should have been transmitted to them.—In short, should the Lord grant the presumptuous demand of those who refuse to believe without the testimony of their own senses; and should the Saviour appear to every individual through successive generations; how could men *be sure* that this was the identical person crucified on mount Calvary? or how *demonstrate* that the transient vision was not an illusion? Universal uncertainty and doubt must therefore be the consequence of rejecting such unanswerable and multiplied evidences, as the Lord has mercifully vouchsafed us, of that great event which we this day commemorate.

II. We proceed to shew what inferences may be deduced from the subject before us.

It would be the grossest inconsistency, and the most absurd trifling, to contend earnestly that Christ is risen, and then overlook or deny the peculiar doctrines which his resurrection was intended to authenticate. We infer therefore from our subject that Jesus is indeed the Son of God, "One with the Father," "God manifest in the "flesh." On account of various expressions which he used in speaking of himself, he was charged with blasphemy, and with making himself "equal "with God." For this crime he was condemned by Caiaphas and the Jewish council; who said before the Roman governor, "We have a law, "and by our law he ought to die, because he "made himself the Son of God."[1] The centurion who attended his crucifixion could not but know for what crime he suffered: when therefore he witnessed the miracles which accompanied his death, he cried, "Certainly this was a righteous "person!"—"Truly this was the Son of God!"[2] When incredulous Thomas was at length convinced that Christ was risen from the dead, all that he had before heard, seen, believed, or hoped, seems at once to have rushed into his mind; and he exclaimed in adoration, "My Lord, and my "God!"—Thus was Jesus "declared to be the "Son of God with power, by the resurrection "from the dead." He was demonstrated to be the promised Messiah, the Seed of the woman, the Seed of Abraham, the Son of David, Emmanuel,

[1] John xix. 7. [2] Luke xxiii. 47; Matt. xxvii. 54.

"the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the "Prince of peace," "JEHOVAH our Righteous-"ness;" and whatever the prophets from the beginning had spoken concerning the expected glorious Redeemer. All that he had spoken of himself was likewise thus fully proved to be true: it now was manifest that he was warranted to say, "I and my Father are One:" "He that hath seen "me hath seen the Father:" "Before Abraham "was I AM:" "I am the Way, and the Truth, "and the Life: no man cometh to the Father but "by me:" "No man knoweth the Father but "the Son, and he to whom the Son shall reveal "him:" "I am the Light of the world:" "I am "the Resurrection and the Life:" "If any man "thirst let him come unto me and drink:" "The "Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all "judgment to the Son; that all men should ho-"nour the Son, even as they honour the Father. "He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not "the Father that sent him."—In short the resurrection of Christ not only demonstrates the truth of Christianity, but the infallible certainty of all its doctrines, and authenticates the whole scripture as *divinely inspired.* His testimony proves it in respect of the Old Testament; and the New was written by his chosen witnesses, and attested by all the miracles which they wrought in his name. So that the Lord now speaks to us in every part of scripture, as far as it respects our dispensation and suits our case, with as much authority as he did to Israel from mount Sinai; but with words of mercy and grace, instead of terror and dismay.

For if Christ be risen from the dead, then is his atonement accepted. "He died for our sins and "rose again for our justification." He was, as it were, arrested for our debt, and cast into the prison of the grave: but, as full payment had been made, he was speedily liberated. 'Having over-'come the sharpness of death, he hath opened the 'kingdom of heaven to all believers.' The foundation of our hopes is now surely laid: the way of access to a throne of grace is now made manifest: for the risen Saviour is also ascended into the heavens to appear in the presence of God for us; and "he is able to save to the uttermost all them "that come to God by him, seeing he ever liveth "to make intercession for them."

The resurrection of Christ assures us, that "all "power in heaven and earth is given to him;" and that "he is made Head over all things to his "church." "He both died, and rose again, and "revived, that he might be the Lord both of the "dead and the living," "Angels, principalities, "and powers are made subject to him:". "he has "the keys of death and hell:" "He is King of "kings and Lord of lords:" all nature obeys him: all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are laid up in him: he has unsearchable riches and invincible power: the fulness of the Spirit resides in him: "All the fulness of the Godhead dwelleth "in him bodily:" "He is become the Author of "eternal salvation to all them that obey him:" and "he must reign till all his enemies are made "his footstool."—It is therefore no light matter that we are considering. "Yet," saith JEHOVAH, "I have set my King upon my holy hill of Zion.—

"Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish." Every individual must either bow to the sceptre of his grace, or be broken in pieces by the iron rod of his omnipotent indignation.[1]

We are also taught that true Christians are conformed to Christ in his death, resurrection, and ascension. By motives and grace derived from their crucified and risen Redeemer, they die to their former hopes, pleasures, and pursuits: their sensibility to temporal things is deadened: carnal self-love, the main-spring of their activity in past times, is broken: "they are crucified with Christ; "nevertheless they live; yet not they, but Christ "liveth in them:" they "know him and the "power of his resurrection:" new principles, feelings, and actuating motives are communicated: "they account themselves dead indeed unto sin, "but alive unto God: "They live no longer to "themselves, but to him that died for them and "rose again:" "they are risen with Christ, and "seek those things which are above:" "their "conversation is in heaven;" and, in proportion to the degree of their faith and grace, they ascend and reign with Christ, in the nature of their joys and the temper of their hearts. Thus they are prepared, whenever they leave this world, to share that "fulness of joy, and those pleasures, which "are at God's right hand for evermore."

As our risen Redeemer ever liveth and reigneth in heaven, to manage all the concerns of his people, and make all ready for their reception; we may adopt with exulting joy the apostle's

[1] 2 Thess. i. 8—10.

words: "If when we were enemies we were re-
"conciled to God by the death of his Son; much
"more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his
"life."[1] "Who shall lay any thing to the charge
"of God's elect? it is God that justifieth, who is
"he that condemneth? it is Christ that died, yea,
"rather, is risen again; who is even at the right
"hand of God; who also maketh intercession for
"us.—Who shall separate us from the love of
"Christ?"[2] Surely our Friend, who died, and rose again for us, will take care "that none shall "pluck us out of his hands," and will come at death to "receive us to himself, that where he is "there we may be also."

Finally, as Christ is risen from the dead, he "is "become the first-fruits of them that slept."—"The hour cometh, when all that are in the graves "shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they "that have done good to the resurrection of life, "and they that have done evil to the resurrection "of damnation." At that awful period, he will ascend his tribunal, finally to separate his people from his enemies: and "these shall go away into "everlasting punishment, but the righteous into "life eternal." The bodies of the wicked will be rendered incorruptible, and capable of enduring the vengeance reserved for them, "where their "worm dieth not, and their fire is not quenched;"[3] and those of the righteous will be raised spiritual and immortal, and fitted to participate the holy joys of heaven. "The Saviour, the Lord Jesus,

[1] Rom. v. 10. [2] Rom. viii. 33—35.
[3] Mark ix. 48—50.

"shall change our vile body, that it may be "fashioned like unto his glorious body, according "to the working whereby he is able even to sub- "due all things unto himself."[1] In this prospect, the believer, when strong in faith, may adopt the apostle's words and say, "O death, where is thy "sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The "sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is "the law: but thanks be to God, who giveth us "the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

III. We conclude with a few hints by way of application.

It may be useful, especially to young persons, to contemplate the prevailing scepticism and infidelity of the age, in connexion with the subject we have been considering. God hath vouchsafed us a revelation of himself, and of his will concerning us, authenticated in the most unanswerable manner, most beneficial in its nature and tendency, and exactly suited to our circumstances: yet this revelation is opposed, reviled, or ridiculed, by numbers who pretend to *virtue*; and affirm that unbelief, *at most*, can only be a harmless error, neither very criminal nor dangerous. But the scripture speaks a very different language. We read of "an evil heart of unbelief, in departing "from the living God." Our Lord says, "How "can ye believe who seek honour one of another?" "Light is come into the world, and men love "darkness rather than light, because their deeds "are evil." Unbelief therefore is the offspring of ambition, love of sin, and dislike to God and ho-

[1] Phil. iii. 20, 21.

liness. It rejects the remedy which everlasting wisdom and mercy have provided for our miseries; it "makes God a liar;" it despises his grace, and defies his power and justice; and is therefore inseparably connected with eternal damnation. "Let "no man deceive you with vain words." Men oppose the scripture because it opposes their favourite pursuits; and denounces an awful sentence against all who do not humbly repent, believe the gospel, and become the faithful subjects of the holy Jesus. They do not in reality need more evidence; but a more unprejudiced, teachable, and spiritual mind. "If they believe not "Moses and the prophets," or the apostles and evangelists; "neither would they be persuaded "though one rose from the dead." Beseech the Lord therefore to remove from you 'all hardness 'of heart, and contempt of his word and com-'mandment;' "to open your understandings that "you may understand the scriptures;" and to "give you repentance to the acknowledging of "the truth; that you may recover yourselves out "of the snare of the devil, who takes sinners cap-"tive at his will."

But beware also of a dead faith; which may keep men in the way of instruction, but is wholly unavailing to salvation. The faith demanded by our Lord is a living active principle: it receives him for all those purposes which he came into the world to effect; it applies to him, depends on him, and follows his directions: and, "working by "love," "purifying the heart," and "overcoming "the world," it produces unreserved obedience to

Christ, and careful imitation of his most perfect example.

The subject before us is peculiarly suited to the burdened conscience and desponding heart of those, who are "poor and of a contrite spirit, and "tremble at God's word." Did the Son of God so love and pity proud obstinate rebels and enemies, as to give himself a sacrifice on the cross for their sins? And will he now, on his glorious throne, refuse to stretch forth his powerful arm, to rescue the humble penitent who earnestly supplicates his mercy? No, my brethren, he delights to save. Come to him, wait on him, wait in the use of the appointed means, and you shall soon know the power of his resurrection, the depth of his condescension, and the riches of his grace.

But if we have "tasted that the Lord is gra-"cious," and can rejoice in having such a Representative and Advocate, to manage our concerns in heaven; let us remember that we are honoured to be his representatives on earth; to shew the excellency of his religion by our example; to be useful to his redeemed people, and to promote his cause in the world. Let us then ask ourselves whether Paul, when constrained by the love of Christ, would have declined any service, as too mean, laborious, self-denying, expensive, or perilous, which the command and honour of his Lord called him to perform? And whether he would not have more fully improved even *our* talents and advantages, than we have hitherto done? Let us review our conduct, and consider what ability or opportunity we have of honouring

Christ among men; let us reflect on our obligations and prospects; and see to it that "our lights "be burning and our loins girded," that when he cometh we may be found watching, and employed in a proper manner.—And "may the God of "peace, who brought again from the dead the "great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood "of the everlasting covenant, make us perfect in "every good work to do his will; working in us "that which is well-pleasing in his sight through "Jesus Christ. To whom be glory for ever and "ever. Amen."

SERMON XIX.[1]

ISAIAH XXXII. 15.

Until the Spirit be poured upon us from on high!

In the beginning of this chapter, the evangelical prophet foretels the auspicious advent and benign government of the Messiah; perhaps with some reference to Hezekiah's equitable and prosperous reign over Judah. He then denounces sentence on the careless, obstinate, and unbelieving Jews, in language aptly descriptive of their condition ever since the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans: and then he declares, that these desolations would endure, "until the Spirit should be "poured upon them from on high;" the happy effects of which gracious dispensation he predicts in the most energetic language. This seems to be the prophetical meaning of the chapter; the concluding verses of which have not hitherto received their accomplishment.—But the present occasion fixes our attention to the words of the text: and I shall endeavour from them,

I. To explain what is meant by "the pouring "out of the Spirit from on high:"

II. To consider more particularly the nature and effects of this promised blessing:

[1] Preached on Whitsunday, 1794.

III. To make some remarks on the emphatical word, "Until:"

IV. To point out some instructions more immediately arising from the subject.

I. I would explain the words here used.

The apostle calls Christianity "the ministration "of the Spirit:"[1] and it is certain however it may be overlooked, that the promise of the Spirit pervades the New Testament, in the same manner as that of a Messiah does the old. The language used concerning this subject, evidently implies the Personality and Deity of the Holy Spirit. He is represented as *hearing, speaking, willing, commanding, forbidding,* and as *receiving* and *executing a commission:* and this not in allegories and parables, but in histories, didactic discussions, laws and grants, where precision is indispensably necessary, and a literal interpretation peculiarly suitable; yet beyond all doubt these are *personal* actions. At the same time divine perfections and operations are ascribed to him. He is said to dwell in the hearts of all believers, as in his temple, to "search "the deep things of God," to raise the dead and to effect a new creation.—He is called, "the Spirit "of holiness," "the Spirit of truth," "the Spirit "of life," "the Spirit of power," "the Spirit of "wisdom and knowledge," "the eternal Spirit," and "the Comforter." If then the Holy Spirit be a Person possessing divine perfections, and performing divine operations; and if the same be true of the Father, and of the Son also; then the ancient doctrine of the Trinity is evidently scriptural,

[1] 2 Cor. iii. 8

though we can neither explain nor comprehend so deep a mystery.

If we further examine the subject, we shall find that the scriptures uniformly ascribe all miraculous powers, prophecy, and inspiration to the immediate agency of the Holy Spirit: so that the wonderful works of Christ himself, and the exercise of his mediatorial offices on earth, are spoken of as performed by his anointing: "The Holy Ghost "was not given by measure unto him."[1] And St. Paul particularly describes the diversity of gifts communicated "by the same Spirit, dividing to "every man severally as he willed."[2] The predictions of the prophets concerning "the pouring "out of the Spirit," in the days of the Messiah,[3] as well as our Lord's promises to his disciples, may have a special reference to these extraordinary gifts and powers; and to that display of the ascended Redeemer's glory and majesty, which was made on the day of Pentecost: but it should also be noted, that effects were produced, at that important season, by the same divine Agent, which were far more valuable to those by whom they were experienced.

If we accurately study the language of the sacred oracles, we shall be convinced that the Holy Spirit is there spoken of as the immediate Author of all that is holy and excellent in man: and that a spiritual death, and a total incapacity of delighting in God and heavenly things, universally prevail in the human heart, till "the law of the

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In these respects we are warranted to expect the pouring out of the Spirit on our souls and congregations: and we are confident that all true Christians are "the temple of the Holy Ghost, an

[1] Eph. i. 17, 18.

"habitation of God through the Spirit;" and we are amazed that any man, who calls himself a disciple of Christ, should be so ignorant, as to deny this fundamental truth of the gospel, or so profane as to turn it into ridicule! "If ye," says our Lord, "being evil, know how to give good "gifts unto your children, how much more shall "your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to "them that ask him?"[1] This accords to the promise of the Lord by his prophet, "I will put my "Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my "statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments and "do them."[2]

Far be it from us to affect equality with prophets and apostles: nor do we expect any new revelations: for the scriptures soberly interpreted are the standard of truth. But we profess to depend on the Holy Spirit to enable us properly to understand them. We have no other rule of duty than the commandments of God: but we need the promised teaching and assistance of the Holy Spirit to enable us to understand this rule, to convince us of our manifold deviations from it, to humble and soften our hearts in true repentance, to encourage our hope of mercy, and to help us to apply for it, and to strengthen us for renewed obedience. We do not pretend to know that our sins are pardoned, except as we are conscious that we hate and abhor them, and humbly trust in Christ to deliver us from them. We infer our interest in the love of God as our heavenly Father, from our love to him as his adopted children; and

[1] Luke xi. 13. [2] Ezek. xxxvi. 25, 26.

from an habitual desire of living to his glory, obeying his commandments, and doing good to our brethren for his sake.

Surely no man, who professes to reverence the scriptures will call this enthusiasm! We disclaim all pretensions to predict future events, or to discover things unknown to others by an immediate revelation from God; yea, we protest against them as derogatory to the holy scriptures and a disgrace to the gospel: and even the incautious language of some well-meaning persons meets with decided disapprobation from others, who hold most of the same doctrines; because it is capable of being perverted or misunderstood.

These remarks having been premised, I observe that, as all spiritual religion is produced by the influences of the Holy Spirit, and every degree of success attending the gospel of Christ must be ascribed to a few drops, as it were, of this fertilizing rain; so, there are seasons in which the Spirit is "poured" from on high, in copious showers, upon some favoured spots of the Lord's vineyard. This was most remarkably the case on the day of Pentecost, and for a considerable time afterwards: and, though the effects were gradually diminished, yet neither the communication of miraculous gifts, nor the abundant converting and sanctifying influences accompanying the preaching of the gospel, ceased, till perhaps more than two centuries afterwards. Such an outpouring of the Spirit attended the labours of the reformers, in the time of Luther, and for many years after his death. Nor has our land been left wholly destitute of this special benefit during the present century: and some

places seem yet to be favoured with it in a considerable degree. In short, they who are conversant with the records of the church, ancient or modern, will recollect various seasons, when, in different places, the Spirit of God was poured upon his people from on high: and all these should be considered as earnests of more abundant blessings, when the fulness of the gentiles shall be brought into the church; and the Jews "shall look to him "whom they have pierced," uniting penitent tears with believing supplications.[1]

II. We proceed to consider more particularly the nature and effects of this promised blessing.

In order to elucidate the subject, we must advert to the present state of the church and of the world. If we look among the constituted ministers of religion, we cannot but perceive that vast numbers consider their profession, in great measure, as a secular employment, and pursue their worldly interests by it, like other orders in the community; without any proportionable earnestness in seeking the salvation of souls, and the advancement of genuine Christianity. Many indeed are very learned and ingenious: but, alas! they embrace and contend for doctrines, which certainly were deduced from a very different source than the sacred scriptures. Others preach several of the great truths of the gospel, but seem little concerned to apply them to the hearts and consciences of mankind; or to excite them, by fervent exhortions and a bright example, to "adorn the doc-"trine of God our Saviour in all things." A few

[1] Zech. xii. 10—14.

indeed appear to be honestly and simply engaged in the most useful work of their sacred function: yet perhaps the skilfulness, boldness, self-denial, diligence, zeal, and faithfulness, even of this remnant, fall much beneath the degree which "men "of like passions" have at more favoured seasons been known to display.

These things should not be considered as a censure of modern times; for the case has been nearly the same in almost every age and part of the church. No external appointment to the ministry no engagement or mode of worship, can, by its own efficacy, dethrone the selfishness of the human heart, or induce the carnally-minded to act from pure motives, and to delight in the spiritual service of the Redeemer. But, when "the Spirit shall "be poured upon us from on high," we may expect that such ministers, as have feebly sought the glory of God in the salvation of souls, will feel their hearts enlarged with more abundant zeal and love; and that a vast accession will be made to their wisdom, and knowledge of Christ and his holy doctrine. They will probably be to a great degree delivered from the fear of men; raised above the love of the world; emancipated from a bigoted regard to systems and parties; filled with most tender compassion to perishing sinners, and fervent love to their brethren; occupied with realizing views of eternal things; prepared for perilous and self-denying services; and disposed cordially to unite with their fellow-labourers in promoting the common cause; without regard to competition, personal interest, or reputation.

Those who have preached the truths of the gos-

pel without application or animation will then probably feel and insist upon their practical tendency, and manifest it in their own conduct. Some who have been adverse to the truth will be won over to preach the faith which once they opposed: loiterers and hirelings will be converted into faithful, diligent, able, and disinterested pastors: many labourers will be sent forth into the vineyard; and every one who partakes of these fertilizing showers will "take heed to the ministry "which he hath received of the Lord, that he "fulfil it."

The change which took place, even in the apostles themselves, after the descent of the Holy Ghost, with the conduct of the primitive ministers of the gospel, and the exhortations addressed to them in the New Testament, abundantly warrant these expectations.

If we next survey the mass of people called Christians, and observe their disposition and conduct; we shall readily understand what effects would be produced by the pouring out of the Spirit upon us. Let us, for instance, consider the inhabitants of this city, and their behaviour in respect of the Lord's day, of public worship, and of the preaching of the gospel. We shall in this review see cause to lament that vast multitudes retire into the country for irreligious recreation, or employ the holy sabbath in travelling; that crowds assemble in places of intemperate indulgence, or frivolous amusement; and that many spend part of the day in adjusting some worldly business, and the residue in sloth or festivity. A few, compared with the whole immense number,

attend at the several places of public worship; the majority of whom, it is to be feared, having paid their weekly tribute, think no more about it; being "as a man who dreameth that he eateth, but he "awaketh, and his soul is empty." Others frequent the places where the word of God is preached, with considerable regularity: but continue "hearers only, and not doers." In short, few comparatively seem to receive the "gospel not "as the word of man, but as the word of God, "which effectually worketh in them that believe;" or "to worship him in spirit and truth:" and even these see cause to lament their want of zeal and fervency; and too often manifest languor and a defect of earnestness and activity, where the glory of God and the benefit of mankind are concerned.

But, if "the Spirit were poured upon us from on "high," the hearts of such persons would expand with holy affections, and be filled with divine consolations. They would become fervent in every religious duty, and earnest in prayer for their ministers and brethren, and for a blessing on every attempt to propagate the gospel; they would bestow pains to impress the instructions of scripture on the minds of their children, relatives, and servants; to recommend the truth by their example, and to enforce it in their conversation: they would say to those with whom they had any influence, "Come ye, and let us go to the house of God, and "he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in "his paths."[1] And, as Andrew brought Peter, and Philip Nathanael, to an acquaintance with Christ;

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" vived and he died." He became deeply sensible, by viewing himself in this glass, that his life, his heart, his state were deplorably bad: and this prepared the way for his understanding and believing the gospel.

The convinced sinner hears " the wrath of God " revealed from heaven against all ungodliness " and unrighteousness of men;" and, instead of his previous favourable opinion of himself, he is ready to adopt the Psalmist's words, " Who can " understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from " my secret faults." " My sins are more in num- " ber than the hairs of my head; my heart faileth " me." When one, who was before careless and inconsiderate, is thus led to make this awful review, with the law of God open before him, and the judgment-seat in full prospect, he then not only judges himself concerning gross crimes and immoralities; but he discovers in his whole conduct, base ingratitude to God and contemptuous forgetfulness of him; idolatrous love of worldly objects; talents entrusted and abused; time and life wasted, and worse than wasted; mischief, irretrievable mischief, done in various ways by his example and influence. Whether he looks back upon his life past, or towards the future reckoning; whether he looks into his heart, or to his God, he is amazed to think of his sins, and all the aggravations of them: he continually discovers evil where he before suspected none, nay, even in the virtues on which he prided himself: he daily weighs himself in the balance, and is always found wanting: his best actions are defective; his motives are corrupt, at least, in part; and, the more

he studies the rule, the fuller is his conviction that if judged according to it he must be condemned.—He now feels the propriety of the apostle's words, "I through the law am dead to "the law:" "for by the law is the knowledge of "sin." And whatever was his former character among men, he adopts from his heart the publican's prayer, "God be merciful to me a sinner!"

These convictions cannot be separated from fear, sorrow, and remorse: but if genuine, and produced by the influence of the Holy Spirit, they will always be accompanied by a measure of hope in the mercy of God.

We may therefore state the next step in true repentance to be *submission*. "Submit yourselves "to God."—We should not think that a disobedient child was really penitent, unless he submitted. The stubborn heart of man stands out against God, and perseveres both in excusing sin, and in repeating the offence. The stout-hearted will neither own his guilt, nor acknowledge the justice of the sentence denounced against him: he is averse to be either taught or ruled by the Lord. Self-will, self-wisdom, and self-righteous pride, unite in opposition to unreserved submission; and these principles of proud rebellion often maintain much influence even under deep and distressing terrors and convictions.

But he who is brought to real repentance unreservedly submits to God, and is willing both to be taught and ruled by him. "Other lords," says he, "have had dominion over me; but by thee "only will I make mention of thy name." He especially becomes willing to be saved in any way

which the word of God prescribes. "Lord," says he, "what wouldst thou have me to do?" He submits to the righteousness of God; he owns that he is a sinner, deserving condemnation, and unable to save himself; and thus a preparation is made, by a *penitent state of heart*, for his understanding the gospel, and most cordially embracing it. For, he now seeks mercy as *mercy*; he comes in the way which God has opened, as far as he understands it; and, when it is explained to him more fully, it exactly answers all the desires of his heart. This indeed forms the connexion between true repentance and living faith. Every one who repents, pleads guilty, prays to be taught the way of salvation, welcomes the gospel, and thus learns to "live by faith in the Son of God," to love the Saviour, and to devote himself to his service.

Humiliation before God is indeed implied under the term submission. It may, however, be advantageously considered as a distinct exercise of the penitent heart. How different were the views, in this respect, which St. Paul had of his own character, when he considered himself as "the chief "of sinners;" as "less than the least of all saints;" and not "meet to be called an apostle;" from those which he had entertained when he was a self-sufficient and self-wise Pharisee! Holy Job, when brought to a right state of heart, "abhorred him-"self in dust and ashes." Few, I apprehend, will expressly say, that they are far better characters than Job was: yet how few can sincerely use his language!—"Then," saith God, "ye shall loathe "yourselves in your own sight."

This humiliation makes way for ingenuous *con-*

fession. "He that covereth his sins shall not "prosper; but whoso confesseth and forsaketh "them, shall have mercy." "If we say that we "have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth "is not in us; but, if we confess our sins, God is "faithful and just to forgive us our sins."—Thus David, "while he kept silence," was deeply distressed; but at last he said, "I will confess my "transgressions unto the Lord; and so," he adds, "thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin." And thus the returning prodigal, without attempting a palliation of his crimes, says, "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no "more worthy to be called thy son."

This union of submission and humiliation forms, I apprehend, what the scripture calls "the broken "and contrite heart." "The sacrifices of God are "a broken spirit: a broken and contrite heart, "O God, thou wilt not despise." "Thus saith "the high and lofty One, who inhabiteth eternity, "whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and "holy place; with him also that is of a contrite "and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the "humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite "ones." "Blessed are the poor in spirit; for "their's is the kingdom of heaven." Pride, stubbornness, self-will, and an independent, self-confident spirit, are the opposites of this contrite heart: but, when submission and humiliation take place, the sinner feels himself a child who needs teaching, a criminal in want of pardon, a leper that desires and longs to be cleansed, a prisoner panting for liberty. These blessings, and all others, are set before him in the gospel: he "asks and receives."

"Lord Jesus, save me, I perish!"—Now hear the words of God: "To this man will I look, to him "that is poor, and is of a contrite spirit, and who "trembleth at my word."

You will no doubt allow that, if we "abhor our-"selves" because we have sinned, we must *hate sin;* and if we abhor sin, as transgression of the law of God, we must love and approve of that law. If we hate sin, we love its opposite, even holiness: and, if we love holiness, we must love the holy perfections of God, the holy character of Christ, the holiness of his disciples, his truths, his ordinances, and whatever has his stamp upon it. With these views and these affections, how can we do otherwise than admire the plan of redemption, as far as we understand it? seeing it is the grandest display of the divine holiness, and of the evil and desert of sin, which ever was made or shall be made, connected with the most endearing view imaginable of the love and mercy of God to sinners. With these things in our minds, we cannot fail to perceive the force of St. Paul's important question, "How shall we, who are dead to sin, "live any longer therein?" If repentance includes conviction of criminality and depravity, submission to God, humiliation, hatred of sin and of ourselves for sin, and love to holiness and to every thing holy; can such a revolution in our judgment and heart fail of producing a change of conduct? Will a man live any longer in that which he abhors, and habitually seek pleasure in what he hates? Impossible! As soon might each animal leave its proper element, and seek satisfaction in that which would prove fatal to it.

True repentance then, consisting in newness of heart, must and will be shewn in newness of life. A true penitent indeed, being still very imperfect, and surrounded with temptations, may be betrayed into sin: but he cannot sin habitually, or, if I may so speak, upon plan and system. This forms a grand discrimination between the real Christian and the hypocrite. The true Christian in this sense, "cannot commit sin, for his seed remaineth "in him; and he cannot sin, because he is "born of God." But a hypocrite pleads the examples of imperfection, or the deeply-lamented sins of real believers, especially those which stand recorded in scripture, as an excuse for habitual, allowed, and unrepented transgression; and as a reason for thinking himself, and expecting to be thought by others, a sound character.

But now let me ask you, can any one hate sin and abhor himself for sin; can he love God and love his neighbour; and yet keep possession of that property, which, previously to repentance, he had iniquitously acquired? Surely, if he has the power and the opportunity of making restitution, and hates the *works* of sin, he will abhor its *wages* likewise. He will never consent to perpetuate the injustice of which he really repents: but will certainly make full restitution, where he can, whatever self-denial it may impose. In numberless instances indeed, it is difficult to know in what particulars, and to what persons, this restitution is due; but the poor, especially the poor of Christ's flock, we have always with us: and here, if difficulties arise, the conscientious penitent will not only bestow what he is conscious is not *his own*,

and yet knows not to whom to restore it, but even add far more to it, if in his power.

The apostle, however, addresses some whom he supposes unable to make restitution: and his language is well worthy our attention. "Let him "that stole, steal no more: but rather let him la- "bour, working with his hands the thing that is "good, that he may have to give to him that "needeth." Mark the reason: not only that he may honestly support himself and his family, but also "that he may have to give to him that "needeth;" thus gradually making amends to man for injuries done to man, though he can make no compensation to his offended God. Here "he hath nothing to pay," and begs a free forgiveness.

In a variety of ways the true penitent, during his daily self-examination, will discover instances in which he has injured others perhaps in their character, or their principles, by his conversation, or his example: and he will here too endeavour to counteract, or make amends for, his misconduct, by any means in his power, however humiliating and self-denying; and especially by henceforth setting a good example, and trying to "do good to all men, and especially to the house- "hold of faith."

To these general outlines of the nature and effects of true repentance, it may be proper to add something more particular, as it relates to the state and inward feelings of the heart. It must be obvious to those who duly consider the subject, that the repentance above described will be attended with great tenderness of conscience, fear

of temptation, jealousy of a man's own heart, and dread of being deceived. For it arises from a conviction that "the heart is deceitful above all things "and desperately wicked."

If then thou art a true penitent, and there be any sin to which thou hast been formerly addicted more than to others, here thou wilt keep the strictest watch; all temptations to this evil thou wilt most cautiously shun; against it thou wilt most frequently and earnestly pray; and, though thou mayest often feel trouble and alarm from it, yet it will henceforth be more opposed, dreaded, and hated, than any other sin.

This tenderness of conscience, and hatred of sin, ("the heart of flesh" which God hath given instead of "the heart of stone;") disposes a man to condemn himself in many things in which he once saw no harm. He now loves the holy rule of the divine law; he loves holiness and hates sin, every kind of sin: and, as a person of delicate cleanliness is disgusted by the least speck of dirt, so the true penitent is more pained by an unguarded word, or an angry temper, than others are, or than he himself used to be, by habitual ungodliness, not to say acts of direct immorality.

"Herein," says the great champion of the doctrines of grace, "Herein do I exercise myself, to "have a conscience void of offence toward God "and toward men." "He delighted in the law "of God," in his inmost soul; yet he could not but see and feel that he had not attained full conformity to it: he admired the standard of holiness, but he could not come up to it: yet he "exercised

"himself" daily in aiming at nearer and nearer conformity. At the same time finding that he "could not do the thing that he would;" but that another "law within him warred against the law "of his mind;" he groaned and complained under this conflict, more than under all his persecutions and sufferings. "Oh wretched man that I am," he says, "who shall deliver me?" 'Lord I love 'thy law, I hate sin; it is my grief and burden; 'yet it dwells and works within me. O gracious 'Lord, when wilt thou deliver me?'

This is the necessary effect of genuine repentance, in an imperfect state: dissatisfaction with ourselves must be the consequence of hatred of sin, and humiliation before God. The deeper the repentance, the more entire the hatred of sin, the keener the eye of the mind in detecting it, and the conscience in condemning it, the greater will be our self-displacency.

He that daily improves in spiritual discernment, in the knowledge of God and of himself, in acquaintance with the holy law and its spiritual requirements, in love of God and holiness, and in tenderness of conscience, is indeed more holy than before, but he is also more humble: for humility is a principal part of holiness. So far therefore from being better pleased with his own character and attainments, he will be more and more abased before God; and it is very probable that, if his judgment be not exactly formed by the scripture, he may be often ready to conclude that he cannot be a true convert, seeing he is so far from that holiness which he longs after and admires.

And now let me ask you, my friends, whether

this was not the nature of St. Paul's progress, from his state of profound pharisaism, to his highest attainments in evangelical holiness? did not his humility keep pace in its increase with every other improvement in his character? Assure yourselves there is no danger lest real repentance, either in its nature or its fruits, should take you off from living by faith in the Son of God: since the more deeply any one repents, and the greater proficiency he makes in humility, tenderness of conscience, and hatred of sin, the fuller is his conviction that "his own righteousnesses are as filthy rags." Good works indeed, as "the fruits of the Spirit," do not deserve this degrading name: but, as they are wrought by us, so much of the evil of our fallen nature mingles with them, that, comparing them with the perfect standard of the holy law, we cannot but feel that they are no more fit to justify us before God, than filthy rags would be for our attire when called on to appear in the presence of an earthly prince. It is only impenitent pride that induces men to attempt "to establish their own "righteousness:" and, the more entirely this is crushed, the more fully will the sinner enter into the apostle's meaning, "I count all things but loss "that I may win Christ, and be found in him; "not having mine own righteousness, which is of "the law, but the righteousness which is of God "by faith." And did any of us feel as deep repentance, and had we made as high attainments in holiness as the apostle, we should then more resemble him in the simplicity of our dependence on Christ; and with him more feelingly say, "The life that I live in the flesh I live by the

" faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave " himself for me."

It is well known that a proud man is not easily made sensible of his obligations, even when great benefits are conferred on him; but the humble think much of every kindness, and are thus disposed to be grateful, and to commend and look up to their benefactors. Is not then the humble penitent peculiarly prepared for receiving, with lively gratitude, the blessings of salvation? Will he not, as he becomes more and more acquainted with the person, the love, the sufferings, and the grace of the Redeemer, be disposed more and more to admire, adore, and praise his name? Will not Immanuel be precious to his heart, and glorious in his eyes? It cannot be otherwise; and hence, love of Christ will keep its proportion with humility and hatred of sin. " The love of Christ con- " straineth us; because we thus judge, that if one " died for all then were all dead; and that he died " for all, that they who live should live no longer " to themselves, but to him who died for them " and rose again." Thus the humble penitent is the most astonished at the Saviour's love, when he sinks the deepest in self-abhorrence; and the language of his heart is, " What shall I render " to the Lord for all his benefits?" Such a view of these subjects served to form the character of apostles and martyrs; this must form missionaries, ministers, and active Christians: and not any idea of merit, any degree of self-complacency, or any mere mercenary aim at reward.

And now consider, my brethren, how these views and affections towards the Redeemer will

influence a man to act towards his fellow Christians. He can do nothing to add to the glory or felicity of his beloved Benefactor; but believers are acknowledged by Christ as his brethren and dear relations. When the thankful penitent, therefore, sees one whom he considers as of the household of faith, he not only considers him as nearly related to himself, but as one who bears the image of his blessed Saviour, who seems thus to address him: "Behold my mother, my sister, my brother!" "Forasmuch as ye did it to these my brethren, ye "did it unto me." He cannot therefore, as far as these views and principles prevail, but feel a cordial love for real Christians, and take pleasure in their society: he must be interested in their concerns, and delight in being kind to them. "Hereby "we know that we have passed from death unto "life, because we love the brethren."

The same state of mind will excite compassion and benevolence to others. Even the wicked must share in the pity, prayers, and good offices of the true penitent, who will endeavour to bring them acquainted with that Saviour in whom are all his hopes. Looking to his cross, seeing how he loved and bled for his enemies, the Christian's resentment against persecutors is softened into compassion: knowing and feeling his own need of forgiveness, he becomes habitually disposed to forgive; and thus learns "to follow peace with "all men," as well as to avoid giving needless offence to any.

The humility and tenderness of conscience, induced by true repentance, teach the Christian, in proportion as they prevail, another very hard les-

son; namely, "in honour to prefer others to him-"self;" and so "to do nothing from strife and "vain glory." And of how much importance this is to the peace of the church, the community, and even the family, every one must be aware.

As, after death is the judgment, and to be accepted at that solemn season is the true penitent's grand concern, and as his views of sin, and of himself, lead him continually to look to Christ who was born in a stable and died on a cross; he cannot but grow more indifferent than he was, or than others are, to the interests, distinctions, and enjoyments of this world; and about the frown or scorn of worldly men. "God forbid that I should "glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ; "by whom the world is crucified to me, and I unto "the world."—This not only prepares a man for patience and perseverance under trials and persecution; but it disposes him to active, self-denying and liberal beneficence, as far as he has opportunity and ability. In a word, there is not a single exercise of Christian affections towards God or Christ, our brethren, our relatives, neighbours or enemies, in which a truly penitent state of heart has not peculiar influence. In doing or in suffering the will of God; in receiving favours and commendations, or in sustaining injuries and reproaches, it leads to the proper temper and conduct: it puts life and fervour into our prayers, praises, thanksgivings, and every act of worship: it is especially the ground requisite to form an acceptable communicant at the Lord's table: for it has been shewn, that repentance and faith are inseparable concomitants, and aid each other's exercise; that repen-

tance, or rather the Holy Spirit by means of repentance, leads the soul to Christ: and, the more he is known, trusted, and loved, the deeper hatred is felt against sin, and the more humbly we walk with God. In this manner, I apprehend, the lively Christian's character is constantly improved: and, though in heaven there will be none of the shame, sorrow, and alarm here commonly attending repentance, yet the penitent's humility and hatred of sin will for ever unite with admiring love of the Saviour, while he sings, "Worthy is the Lamb that "was slain, and hath redeemed us to God with his "blood."

And now ask yourselves, my brethren and fellow-sinners, whether you are partakers of this gracious disposition? Is this your experience, your aim, your view of yourselves, of sin, and of Christ and his salvation? I have a confidence that if it be so with you I may glorify God on your behalf, and say "Then hath God to you also granted repentance "unto life." "There is joy in heaven, among the "angels of God over one sinner that repenteth." These blessed spirits have rejoiced over you, and do rejoice over you; and, though you perhaps may now sow in tears, yet you shall at length rejoice with them: yea, God himself will "rejoice over "you to do you good," even for ever and ever. Therefore lift up your hands that hang down: lift up your hearts with hope and gratitude: and prepare to commemorate his love, who loved you, and gave himself to the death upon the cross for you, and being now exalted on the throne, hath be-

stowed on you "repentance unto life;" and pray always that you may repent more, and believe more, and bring forth more and more the genuine fruits of repentance and faith.

It may, however, be asked, what he is to do who once thought he repented, but amidst the business and bustle of the world, has lost his convictions and seriousness; and knows not to which company he belongs, the penitent or the impenitent? I would answer, that in such a case no stress whatever should be laid on past experience; all must be begun anew; and such a person must come as a sinner to Christ for repentance and remission of sins, and all the blessings of salvation, even as if he had now for the first time heard of his name.

In like manner, so far as doubts prevail in any one, on whatever ground it may be, whether he have repented or not, he should earnestly beg of God to grant him true repentance; and to give him to know that his repentance is sincere. Whatever tends to benumb the conscience, to veil eternal things from his view, to lessen his sense of the evil of sin, or to restore him to impenitent self-complacency; he ought by all means carefully to avoid. Let such a man shun the bustle of company; let him retire into his closet, redeem time for reflection, search the scriptures, pour out his heart in prayer: and, waiting on the Lord in this manner, he will not wait in vain.

Permit me to add a parting word to some whom, perhaps, I may never more address; who hear the word of God, and probably profess to believe it, yet nevertheless are conscious that they live without

great mixture of presumption, against the doctrines of Revelation; especially such as respect the first origin of sin and misery, the criminality of our conduct as fallen creatures, and the justice of God in the judgments denounced against transgressors, should in general be silenced in this manner; and not by entering into detailed arguments on each particular, as if God were "even "such an one as ourselves." "Shall not the Judge "of all the earth do right?"

It may, however, be observed, that many of these objections press *equally* upon every religious system, and not on any one in particular. It is evident that sin and misery do exist and abound. It is undeniable that the Almighty could have prevented the existence of these evils, or limited their progress. To argue then against what he hath done or permitted, because we, blind and ignorant sinners, fancy he might have done better, is nothing less than blasphemy; and, carried to its consequences, directly opposes every kind of religion.

Again, it is evident in fact that man is depraved: and we need only to judge the conduct of the world, as recorded in history, by the simple rules of loving God supremely, and loving our neighbour as ourselves; and the inference is undeniable. Now, if depravity proportionably excuses criminal conduct, then, the more any creature is depraved, the fuller justification of his actual wickedness he possesses. This excuses all the rebellion and malignity of fallen men and fallen angels, throws all the blame of sin on the Almighty himself, who did not see good to prevent its existence; and of course

SERMON XXII.

ON THE EVIL OF SIN, AS COMMITTED AGAINST GOD.

PSALM LI. 4.

Against thee, thee only, have I sinned!

THE occasion on which this Psalm was composed is well known. The awful fall of David, and the most aggravated crimes which he committed, have attracted very general notice. But many remember his sins, who do not appear properly to consider his humiliation and deep repentance. Numbers, on this ground, suppose themselves superior characters, because they are exempt from such flagrant criminality; though there are no evidences that they possess any positive excellence. And not a few who disgrace the religious opinions which they avow, by evident and habitual misconduct, yet satisfy their own consciences, and expect others to entertain a favourable opinion of them; as 'the 'best,' say they, 'have their faults, and even David "committed adultery and murder!' But, if they would have us form the same judgment of their case as Nathan did of David's, they must shew the same spirit of deep repentance that he did. A renowned monarch, having given public scandal by his crimes, composes and publishes this Psalm, and, before his own subjects and the whole world,

gives honour to God by proclaiming his own shame!

The Psalm is throughout the language of the deepest contrition; and has been not improperly called, 'The portrait of a penitent.' The royal Psalmist's crimes had been of such a nature, that they were both deeply injurious to mankind, and also most scandalous in the eyes of the world: yet his views of the obligations he lay under to God, and of his most aggravated violation of them, seem to have swallowed up every other consideration. All else in this comparison appeared trivial in his eyes: and the address of Nathan to him shews that, in this respect, his judgment accorded with that of God himself. "Thou art the man! Thus "saith the Lord God of Israel, I anointed thee "king over Israel, and I delivered thee out of the "hand of Saul; and I gave thee thy master's "house, and thy master's wives into thy bosom; "and gave thee the house of Israel and of Judah: "and, if that had been too little, I would more- "over have given thee such and such things. "Wherefore then hast thou *despised the command-* "*ment of the Lord to do evil in his sight?* Thou "hast killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword, "and hast taken his wife to be thy wife.—There- "fore the sword shall never depart from thine "house; *because thou hast despised me.*"[1]

Observe, my friends, the prophet does not rest the weight of the charge, brought against David, on the injury done to men; but on the ungrateful contempt shewn to God and to his law and authority.

[1] 2 Sam. xii. 7—10.

The prophet adds, " Howbeit, because by this " deed *thou hast caused the enemies of the Lord* " to blaspheme, the child also that is born unto " thee shall surely die."[1] Here again the crime of David is aggravated by the dishonour it had brought on the name of God, through the blasphemies of his enemies.

These considerations may throw light on the words of our text, " Against thee, thee only, have " I sinned!" The wrong done to man by our offences is not to be overlooked, or thought slightly of: but our attention must not be so confined to the evil of them in this respect, as to interfere with a sense of those higher obligations to God which we have violated.—In what I have further to offer on the subject, I shall,

I. Make some introductory remarks:

II. Illustrate the emphatical words here used; " Against thee, thee only, have I sinned:"

III. Consider the evil of sin, as committed against God, and as violating all our obligations to him: And,

IV. Adduce several instances in which this doctrine brings those in deeply guilty, who otherwise would scarcely appear guilty at all; and thus shew how it cuts up by the very roots a self-justifying spirit.

I. I proceed to make some introductory remarks.

In general, the text clearly proves, that the believing penitent's view of the evil of his sins is proportioned to the degree in which he considers the extent of his obligations to God.

[1] 2 Sam. xii. 14.

recollect, that all the various differences, by which men in society, or in respect of religious advantages, are distinguished from each other, whatever they may be, should be considered as enhancing the obligation, and aggravating the criminality of violating it. This was the way in which Nathan addressed David, when he recapitulated the special benefits which God had conferred on him, in order to bring home conviction to his conscience: and here I shall leave to your consideration the providential benefits, and every advantage, with which you severally have been distinguished, as increasing your peculiar obligations, and aggravating every transgression which you have committed.

The aggravated evil of sin, as committed against God, may be shewn by another view of our relation and obligations to him, as transgressors favoured with the discoveries and proposals of the gospel. Having broken the holy law of our Creator, and fallen under his righteous displeasure; instead of leaving us without remedy, to the consequences of our disobedience, he hath revealed himself to us as "merciful and gracious, forgiving iniquity, "transgression, and sin;" as "in Christ recon- "ciling the world unto himself;" as "not sparing "his own Son, but delivering him up for us all, "that with him he might freely give us all things." And, in the most urgent manner, he invites even the vilest of sinners to come and partake of this great salvation.

Beyond all doubt, every additional discovery of the excellency, loveliness, and glory of our great Creator and Judge, proportionably shews the baseness and perverseness of our alienation from him:

rior obligations, the greater benefit we shall eventually render to mankind: but to reverse the order of scripture, is "turning things upside "down,"[1] and placing the glory of the great God below the petty interests of sinful man! Certainly we ought to do good to man "for the Lord's "sake;" and not to glorify God for the sake of man.

But it will soon appear that these anti-scriptural views in great measure supersede the necessity of the gospel; and by feeding self-complacency, and the pride of virtue, have had a powerful effect in producing that disregard to evangelical principles, which forms in many places the peculiar character of the age. "If righteousness come by the law, "then Christ died in vain;" and he who feels no need of his salvation is already prepared, not only to neglect, but to reject and oppose the Gospel.

There is in the natural consciences of men a far greater susceptibility of conviction and guilt, in what relates to their conduct towards each other, than in respect to their behaviour towards God. For too commonly "God is not in all their "thoughts." And, besides this, the sense of the injury done to society by several crimes associates itself with all the ideas on these subjects, which we receive from education, study, and conversation: because the sentiment prevails in the world. Men generally cry shame of those who grossly violate their obligations to their neighbours; and consider them as unfit for society: but they are not thus affected by the conduct of those who

[1] Isa. xxix. 15.

most atrociously and habitually disregard the authority, and are ungrateful for the goodness, of God. Hence it becomes natural for us to connect the idea of criminality with all actions of the former kind, but not with those of the latter.

This indeed forms one ground of the opposition which is every where excited against the doctrines of the gospel. Men are used to judge themselves and their own characters, as they stand related to one another, and according to the rules and maxims established in their circle of society. Weighed in this balance, they are not "found wanting." With a little aid from self-flattery, they conclude that they never did harm to any one, that their hearts are good, and their lives good; and are therefore disposed to take offence, when addressed as sinners needing salvation; and eagerly to dispute against the doctrine of justification by faith alone, as well as against many other truths of Christianity. Indeed it might be conceded to some among them, that if they had only to do with their fellow-creatures, and with the interests of men in this present world, their pleas would at least be plausible. But if such persons would consider their obligations to God, and call themselves to account, how far they have or have not fulfilled them; if they were disposed to condemn themselves for all that his word condemns; weighed in this balance they must certainly be "found want-" ing;" and would soon be led to cry out, "God " be merciful to me a sinner!" And then every part of Christianity would gradually open to their view, as most needful, most gracious, most suitable, and "worthy of all acceptation."

The young man, who respectfully addressed our Lord, and inquired "what he must do to "inherit eternal life:" having over-looked the first table of the law, and interpreted the several precepts of the second as a mere moralist would do, without hesitation replied, "All these have I kept "from my youth." Yet the event shewed that he loved his riches better than the God who made him.

When our Lord, speaking to a lawyer who asked the same question, inquired of him, "What "is written in the law? How readest thou?" he replied by quoting the two great commandments: and our Lord said, "Thou hast answered right; "this do and thou shalt live." But "he, *willing* "*to justify himself*, said unto Jesus, and who is "my neighbour?" He seemed not conscious of having violated his obligations to God, and so made no inquiry about "the first and great com- "mandment;" but, desiring "to justify himself," he appears to ask for a limitation of the too extensive meaning of the second, without which he could not possibly accomplish his object.

This being the case with men in general, it cannot at all be wonderful, that even serious inquirers after salvation are for a time in some measure embarrassed by the same mistake; and find it very difficult to judge of their conduct according to the rules of scripture, and with respect to their relations and obligations to the Almighty; and still more so, to be affected with a humbling sense of guilt on this account, answerable to the views and feelings which they hear described by those who preach the gospel to them.

Indeed it is probable, that conviction of sin, at first, commonly arises from a consciousness of having acted in certain instances contrary to our views of moral obligation; rather than from an accurate comparison of our whole conduct and the state of our hearts, with the law of God and our obligations to him. But afterwards deeper reflection and further inquiry produce a sense of guilt in those thoughts, words, and actions, which once were considered as entirely innocent.

The intention of these remarks, my brethren, is to impress your minds with the immense importance of the subject before us; for the want of duly understanding or adverting to it often keeps serious persons long in a state of hesitation as to the doctrines of the gospel, and exposes them to great danger from the artifices of those who continually are starting objections against the truth.

Indeed even true and established Christians are seldom so deeply affected with a sense of guilt, when betrayed into such sinful inclinations, or actions, as appear *insulated* from all connexion with men, and never likely to injure any one, or to be known except to the omniscient God alone; as they do for those evils which fall under human observation, interfere with the comfort or interest of others, and incur their censure.

But, in proportion to the degree in which this erroneous judgment influences us, it must unquestionably militate against the exercise of genuine repentance, humility, and simple faith in the mercy of God, and the merits of Christ: it must prevent that admiring, adoring love of the divine Redeemer, who shed his blood on the cross as an

atonement for our sins; and that glowing ardour of affection for him, which was the grand peculiarity of the primitive Christians, and their all powerful motive to self-denying labours and sufferings for his sake. This we every where meet with in their writings; alas, how different from 'the frigid zone' of modern Christianity!

II. I would illustrate the emphasis of the Psalmist's words; "Against thee, thee only, have I "sinned."

David perhaps might mean, that, as a king, he was accountable to none but God: but he also, no doubt, intended to confess, that in entire distinction from the inquiry, how far men had been offended or injured by his conduct; he had greatly displeased the Sovereign of the universe, "the "King of kings and Lord of lords." Perhaps some persons at that time might secretly rejoice, that such a man as David had thus kept them in countenance. Joab, for instance, who had committed murder, might inwardly exult on so lamentable an occasion. But, however that might be, He who is "no respecter of persons," and with whom is no difference between the mightiest monarch and the meanest subject, was deeply offended.

The language of the text, "Against thee, thee "only," implies far more than I can express, of the majesty, excellency, and authority of the glorious God; of our relations to him, as the Creator, Governor, and Judge of all; of our obligations to him, in general and particular: and of the return which we ought to "render for all his "benefits."

It is worthy of remark, that no records of antiquity, however admired (the scriptures alone excepted) use language concerning the infinite God, which is in any measure worthy of his incomprehensible majesty and greatness; nay, which is not exceedingly degrading to his character: and, if moderns have at all succeeded better on this subject, it is because they have derived their most adequate ideas from the Bible, though many are unwilling to acknowledge the obligation. Yet, after all, the sublimity of the sacred oracles on this subject is unparalleled. "Great is the Lord, "and greatly to be praised; His greatness is un- "searchable. I will speak of the glorious honour "of thy majesty, and of thy wondrous works; "and men shall speak of the might of thy terrible "acts, and I will declare thy greatness."[1]—"Who "hath measured the waters in the hollow of his "hand, and meted out the heavens with a span, "and comprehended the dust of the earth in a "measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, "and the hills in a balance?" "The nations are "as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the "small dust of the balance. Behold he taketh up "the isles as a very little thing! And Lebanon is "not sufficient to burn; nor the beasts thereof for "a burnt offering! All nations before him are as "nothing: and they are counted unto him less "than nothing and vanity! To whom then will ye "liken God?"[2] Against this Being, of glorious power and majesty unspeakable, a poor worm

[1] Psal. cxlv. 3—6. [2] Is. xl. 12—18.

dares to rise in rebellion! "Against *thee* have "I sinned!"

When Job, in the heat of controversy, had spoken irreverently concerning God; his friends accused him of hypocrisy, and of crimes of which he was consciously innocent; and even Elihu bore too hard upon him: so that he was not convinced or humbled on that account. But, when "Je- "hovah spoke to him from the whirlwind," though he did not deign to argue on the justice of his dispensation, but merely exhibited before him some displays and illustrations of his greatness, power, and majesty; he soon brought Job to submit, to plead guilty, and to say, "I am vile," "I abhor "myself, and repent in dust and ashes."

St. Paul also seems to have taken up this subject in the same manner, when he answers an irreverent caviller against the dealings of God with his creatures; "Nay, but, O man, who art thou "that repliest against God?" 'Consider what a 'frail, short sighted, and erring creature thou art, 'even in common things; and darest thou pre- 'sume to dispute against God on such deep sub- 'jects as are evidently beyond thy comprehension, 'or even thy investigation?' "Canst thou by "searching find out God? Canst thou find out "the Almighty to perfection? It is higher than "heaven, what canst thou do? It is deeper than "hell, what canst thou know?" "Oh the depth "of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge "of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, "and his ways past finding out!"

Many objections often raised, not without a

great mixture of presumption, against the doctrines of Revelation; especially such as respect the first origin of sin and misery, the criminality of our conduct as fallen creatures, and the justice of God in the judgments denounced against transgressors, should in general be silenced in this manner; and not by entering into detailed arguments on each particular, as if God were "even "such an one as ourselves." "Shall not the Judge "of all the earth do right?"

It may, however, be observed, that many of these objections press *equally* upon every religious system, and not on any one in particular. It is evident that sin and misery do exist and abound. It is undeniable that the Almighty could have prevented the existence of these evils, or limited their progress. To argue then against what he hath done or permitted, because we, blind and ignorant sinners, fancy he might have done better, is nothing less than blasphemy; and, carried to its consequences, directly opposes every kind of religion.

Again, it is evident in fact that man is depraved: and we need only to judge the conduct of the world, as recorded in history, by the simple rules of loving God supremely, and loving our neighbour as ourselves; and the inference is undeniable. Now, if depravity proportionably excuses criminal conduct, then, the more any creature is depraved, the fuller justification of his actual wickedness he possesses. This excuses all the rebellion and malignity of fallen men and fallen angels, throws all the blame of sin on the Almighty himself, who did not see good to prevent its existence; and of course

renders it impossible that "God should judge the "world." But, whatever proves too much, by all the rules of fair argument is allowed to prove nothing,

"Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, I "cannot attain unto it." The dictates of conscience and of common sense are in this case far preferable to presumptuous reasonings on things evidently beyond our capacity. "To man he saith, The fear "of the Lord, that is wisdom: and to depart from "evil that is understanding." "Secret things be-"long unto the Lord our God: but the things "that are revealed belong to us."

The Psalmist in the context speaks on this subject. "I have done this evil in thy sight, that "thou mightest be justified in thy saying, and "clear when thou art judged. Behold I was "shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother con-"ceive me!" Did the royal penitent mean to urge this as an extenuation of his crimes? Certainly not, but to shew that they were not occasional slips, but the effect of a depraved nature. "As "saith the proverb of the ancients, Wickedness "proceedeth from the wicked." And therefore he prays, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and "renew a right spirit within me."

When we consider the majesty and greatness of God, we may well be abashed at the consideration of our rebellions against him: but the discovery of his glorious excellency, of the perfection of his loveliness and beauty, is calculated to give us still deeper views of the criminality of our conduct. His omnipotence and omniscience, and omnipresence, and all his natural attributes, constitute his

greatness: but his infinite wisdom, justice, truth and love, constitute his *holiness* and *goodness.* The display of his *greatness* should awe us into reverential submission: but that of his *goodness* should win us to admiring, adoring love. "Thy name only "is excellent, and thy praise is above heaven and "earth." And what can be more irrational and perverse, than to neglect, despise, or dislike infinite loveliness and excellence? What more reasonable than the command, "Thou shalt love the "Lord thy God with all thy heart?"

But we should also recollect, that this great and glorious God, is the Creator, and consequently the Proprietor, Governor, and Judge of the Universe. Observe the language of scripture on this subject, "The Lord made all things *for himself.*" "*For* "*thy pleasure* they are, and were created." Indeed this is no mean proof of our Saviour's deity, that it is not only said, "All things were made *by* "*him,*" but likewise "All things were made *for* "*him.*" "Thine is the kingdom, and the power, "and the glory, for ever and ever: Amen." This was David's view of that God against whom he had sinned. "Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and "the power, and the majesty: for all that is in the "heaven and in the earth is thine. Thine is the "kingdom, O Lord, and thou art exalted as head "above all."[1]

Against this great Creator, and universal Proprietor and Lord of all, every one of our sins is committed: and not merely against our fellow-creatures: against one infinitely above us, and not

[1] 1 Chron. xxix. 11.

one who is on an equality with us, as partaker of our common nature.

This great Creator of all worlds is also the author of our existence; the Father of our spirits; the giver of all our powers and abilities; the God "in "whom we live, and move, and are." "Hear, O "heavens, and give ear, O earth, I have nourished "and brought up children, and they have rebelled "against me!" The God, against whom every sin is committed, stands at once related to us, as our Creator, Benefactor, Governor, and Judge. The authority of a sovereign, the kindness of a parent, and the liberality of a benefactor, are all here united; yea, far, far exceeded: and can we but feel the emphasis of the language used in the text, "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned?"

It is possible in human affairs for these different obligations to unite in one case. Thus Absalom, the son, the indulged son, as well as the subject, of David, after manifold favours confered on him by his affectionate parent, proved a traitor to his prince, and a monster of ingratitude to his benefactor, and intentionally a murderer of his father! While David felt himself deeply shocked at his son's atrocious violation of such accumulated obligations, what must have been his reflection on his own past conduct against God, in the instance before us? Could he help saying to himself, 'Men 'justly exclaim against the behaviour of Absalom 'towards his kind father and sovereign: but my 'heart reproaches me with the violation of far 'higher and greater obligations to God, my Crea-'tor, Benefactor, and Judge?'

In this part of our subject, it may be proper to

recollect, that all the various differences, by which men in society, or in respect of religious advantages, are distinguished from each other, whatever they may be, should be considered as enhancing the obligation, and aggravating the criminality of violating it. This was the way in which Nathan addressed David, when he recapitulated the special benefits which God had conferred on him, in order to bring home conviction to his conscience: and here I shall leave to your consideration the providential benefits, and every advantage, with which you severally have been distinguished, as increasing your peculiar obligations, and aggravating every transgression which you have committed.

The aggravated evil of sin, as committed against God, may be shewn by another view of our relation and obligations to him, as transgressors favoured with the discoveries and proposals of the gospel. Having broken the holy law of our Creator, and fallen under his righteous displeasure; instead of leaving us without remedy, to the consequences of our disobedience, he hath revealed himself to us as "merciful and gracious, forgiving iniquity, "transgression, and sin;" as "in Christ recon- "ciling the world unto himself;" as "not sparing "his own Son, but delivering him up for us all, "that with him he might freely give us all things." And, in the most urgent manner, he invites even the vilest of sinners to come and partake of this great salvation.

Beyond all doubt, every additional discovery of the excellency, loveliness, and glory of our great Creator and Judge, proportionably shews the baseness and perverseness of our alienation from him:

and, the more fully the sinner is encouraged to expect forgiveness and reconciliation, the more inexcusable must he be, if he persist in rebellion. Now, the character of God, as revealed in the gospel, comprises such an union of greatness and condescension, justice and mercy, holiness and love, wisdom and truth, as constitutes "the perfection "of beauty," and excites the most fervent adoring and admiring praises of the heavenly worshippers: while at the same time such a foundation is laid for our hope, that nothing but "neglecting so "great salvation" can prevent our attaining everlasting felicity, notwithstanding all our crimes, and all our depravity and temptations!

This may lead us to consider a still further aggravation of sin: namely, when it is committed by one who has experienced the pardoning love and renewing grace of God, who has come to him, and walked with him; who has found him faithful and merciful: who has rejoiced in him with joy unspeakable, and been animated to call on others to share in his satisfactions; who has gloried in God, as his all-sufficient portion, his sun, his shield, and his exceeding great and everlasting reward; and who has been favoured with signal deliverances and comforts, in manifest answer to his believing prayers. To sin against such mercy and love as this, to rebel against so gracious a father and friend, seems to form the highest aggravation of transgression that can be conceived. Thus the sins of believers, instead of being slight offences, are in fact the most inexcusable of all crimes: and the conviction of this, even in respect to those failures which bring no scandal on reli-

gion, powerfully tends to keep the true Christian humble before his God; as well as to enhance his admiring gratitude for the riches of pardoning grace.

This was especially the case with David. He had been taken from the sheepfold, and raised to the throne. He had been honoured in providence; made a prophet; and inspired, as "the sweet "psalmist of Israel," to compose songs of praise for the use of spiritual worshippers through successive generations. But, above all, he had enjoyed such consolation in his own soul, while employed in the worship and service of his God, as dictated language so animated, and even rapturous, that to this day it seems unequalled. And yet, after all, this very person had to say, "Against "thee, thee only, have I sinned!" For he had "despised the commandment of his God;" yea, he had even "despised God" himself, who "had "comforted him on every side;" and who was ready to add still more, and that abundantly, to all his former benefits!

And have not some, here present, had occasion in many instances, though not so awful as this of David, to look back on the Lord's past kindness, and on the comforts they have enjoyed in communion with him; and then to confess, with shame and sorrow, that they have most basely treated their gracious Benefactor with contempt and ingratitude? And can the violation of any other tie be so heinous, as thus "sinning against "the Lord?"

Take into consideration, then, my brethren, the majesty and authority of God; his holiness and

SERMON XXIII.

ON CHRIST'S LOVE TO PENITENT SINNERS.

LUKE XV. 6.

Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost.

"THEN drew near unto Jesus all the publicans "and sinners for to hear him." Persons of bad character, not only in the sight of God, but also in the judgment of men, were so impressed by our Lord's miracles and discourses, that they voluntarily "drew near," not to cavil or scoff, but "to "hear him." Yet, while he compassionately regarded and instructed them, the "Scribes and "Pharisees murmured, saying, This man receiveth "sinners, and eateth with them."

To repress these proud objectors; to illustrate the propriety of his conduct as the Saviour of sinners; and to encourage the penitent, both at that time and in all future ages; our gracious Lord spoke the three parables which stand recorded in this chapter.

We have lately considered the scriptural view of "repentance unto life;" and the majesty and glory of that God against whom we have sinned, with our relations and obligations to him, as aggravating the criminality of our conduct; and have

but, by precepts and example, shewed that they even thought they did right in conforming to it!

In every government, submission to the supreme authority is the first social duty, and treason the highest crime; nay, other crimes in general are punished, not merely because injurious to individuals, but because they are acts of disobedience against the sovereign, or the state.

If a person be ever so amiable in private life; if he be punctual in his payments, upright in his dealings, faithful to his engagements, kind to his relations, a good master or a good landlord, compassionate and liberal to the poor, and courteous to all: yet, if he have committed high treason, having failed in his highest obligation, the other parts of his conduct are not considered by his judges; his life is forfeited, and nothing but mercy, even the mercy of the prince against whom he has offended, can deliver him from condign punishment.

The same might be fully shewn by other illustrations. Nothing can make amends for a failure in the leading obligation: nothing can excuse or counterbalance unfaithfulness in a wife, or disobedience in a son: while the more affectionate and excellent the husband or father the more aggravated is the offence. And to persist, against repeated pardons and kindnesses, in such conduct, would stamp the offender as a monster of ingratitude, however moral and well-behaved in other respects.

But many endeavour to excuse themselves by saying, that they do not *mean* to offend God in this or the other action; for they never thought

about him. And thus the very sin, with which they are especially charged, is pleaded in extenuation of other crimes! It is the grand criminality in the conduct of men, that they forget God. Every object we behold proclaims his existence and glory: our own consciousness, nay, reflection on our own bodies and souls, is suited to bring him to our thoughts. We live every hour on his bounty, and are continually upheld by his arm; yet we forget him, and excuse our other sins on the ground of that forgetfulness! But remember, my fellow sinners, that "the wicked shall be "turned into hell; and all the people that forget "God." Can there be a more unequivocal proof of ingratitude, contempt, and aversion, than this habitual forgetfulness of our glorious Sovereign, and our daily Benefactor?

If your child loves you, does he forget you? And should a son, whom you had tenderly and carefully educated, and with great expense placed in a very comfortable situation, and then charged, as he valued your favour and happiness, to avoid this, and to attend to that, particular: should he, I say, persist in a conduct in all respects diametrically opposite to your will; and then plead that indeed he did not mean to offend you, for he had forgotten both you, and your kindness, and your counsel; what would you think of his behaviour? Would you not suppose, that he meant to add insult to disobedience? "The carnal mind is "enmity against God." This carnal enmity is the source of our forgetfulness; and it is also an aggravation of our guilt.

Ingratitude is generally allowed to be one of

the basest and most detestable of crimes, where man only is concerned: but what are our obligations to our best earthly benefactors, compared with those which are hourly conferred on us by our heavenly Father and Friend? yet who can justly say that he has not been ungrateful to God?

It is indeed a melancholy truth that, the more benefits God bestows in his providence, the greater neglect and ingratitude do men commonly manifest. Hence it is that the prosperous are far more apt to forget God than the afflicted; the rich more in general than the poor; the healthy more than the sick; and we are never in so much danger of impious contempt of him, as when he lavishes so many benefits upon us that we have every thing according to our own mind, and "more than "heart can wish."

This is not only the case, in respect of different persons placed in more or less prosperous circumstances, but in the same persons; even he that is truly pious in general acts better when afflicted than when successful. David behaved more honourably when persecuted by Saul, and when Absalom rose in rebellion against him, than he did "when the Lord had given him rest from all his "enemies round about."—Religion commonly flourishes most under persecution and affliction; and it seems almost an universal rule, that the more providence indulges, either individuals or collective bodies, the more negligent and ungrateful they become? "When thy riches increase, and "when thy gold, and thy silver, and all that thou "hast are multiplied, then beware lest thou forget

"the Lord thy God." And is not this undeniable fact an awful demonstration of our extreme depravity? Will any man seriously set himself to excuse such a temper and conduct?

Man's forgetfulness of God arises, in no small degree, from his inordinate love of worldly objects. He *idolatrously* values wealth, pleasure, power, or the honour which cometh from men. I say, *idolatrously*, for covetousness is idolatry, and sensual indulgence is idolatry. They are so called in scripture. And he who loves either wealth, pleasure, pomp, or any earthly object, more than God, is as really an idolater as if he had formed his gold into an image, and prostrated himself before it in stupid adoration. "Ye have forsaken "the fountain of living waters, and have hewn "out to yourselves cisterns, broken cisterns, which "can hold no water." "The world and the "things of the world" are put in the place of God: and in this way even innocent and needful pursuits and employments often become the occasions of great guilt.

Judas sold his Lord for thirty pieces of silver: and the Jews preferred Barabbas, a thief and robber, to Christ. We stand astonished at their baseness: but have we not, in some respects, preferred as mean or as vile objects to the infinite God, and to the gracious Saviour of lost sinners?

In short, if the human heart were not "deceit-"ful above all things," as well as "desperately "wicked," our conduct in this respect towards God would never have been palliated. The criminality of man consists in rebellion against God, and in setting his own will in opposition to that of

his Maker: every favour which the Lord bestows, aggravates that criminality: and to endeavour to plead any excuse for such complicated guilt, renders us still more criminal in his sight whose "judgment is according unto truth."

I proceed therefore,

IV. To prove that this view of the subject brings in many exceedingly guilty, who, on other grounds, would scarcely seem at all so; and that this shews the need which men in general have of the mercy and grace proposed to them in the gospel.

Acts of gross immorality, evidently injurious to society, are sometimes avoided in the habitual tenour of a man's conduct, from prudential and worldly motives, and during the whole, or a great proportion, of his life: and, when this is by no means the case, they are *occasional*, and form but a small part of the actual conduct of men in general; if the most abandoned of the human species be excepted. But neglect and forgetfulness of God, ingratitude, and a will opposed to his will, and a violation of all obligations to him, are in every ungodly man *habitual*; they run through every day, and every action of the day; they influence all his thoughts, words, and deeds; they constitute his selected plan of life; they influence him in the spending of his time and money; and they direct the use made of his talents, property, health, spirits, body, and soul. Every thing is by men of this character arranged and conducted, as it were, by a *system* of forgetfulness and neglect of God: of ingratitude and rebellion, nay, defiance of him. So that, where no gross vice is perpe-

but love to us as lost sinners! He pitied our wretchedness, while he abhorred our crimes! He anticipated even our desires, and our consciousness of misery and danger! "It is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ "Jesus came into the world to save sinners;—"even the chief of sinners." "Ye know the "grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, how that, though "he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, "that ye, through his poverty, might be made "rich."

When he thus assumed "the form of a servant," from compassion to the lost and wretched, he did not appear in a state of outward splendour, but in the deepest poverty; and, while he refused to act as a judge, and shunned those who would have made him a king; yet, as the tender Shepherd seeking his lost sheep, he performed, and so dignified, the office of a preacher, by making that his peculiar constant employment.

With weary, toilsome steps, he traversed the whole land of Israel; (a stranger to those accommodations with which the most of us are indulged;) and made it the business of his life to seek out and save the lost. He pitied the ignorant and neglected, "because they were as sheep not "having a shepherd;" and allowed himself no space for rest or refreshment, (often reserving only the hours of night for secret devotion,) that he might lose no opportunity of bringing lost sheep to the fold of God. This was "his meat," his pleasure, and his joy: and here, especially, he hath left his ministers "an example that they "should follow his steps." This was the business

posed publicly to avow this opinion; would scarcely be able to fix on any particular? Regard to health, character, peace, and interest; the company with which they have been used to associate; and various other considerations, would induce them to persevere nearly in the same tenour of outward conduct, if they were of opinion that no future state of retribution awaited them; if they had in no degree the fear of God before their eyes. But the case would be very different, if they attended to even the same things from a real religious principle. And surely that must be vastly different from Christianity, which would scarcely be affected if Christianity were abrogated!

Sins of *omission* seldom burden the consciences of men in general. If direct violations of some express prohibition are not chargeable upon them, they do not often condemn themselves for neglect of duty. They forget that there are *injunctions* as well as *prohibitions*; and that refusing to hallow the Lord's day, or to honour and obey their parents and superiors, is as really disobedience to God, as robbery, adultery, or murder. For unless we consider sin as committed against God, sins of omission will almost always be overlooked.

It has pleased our gracious God, to give us the holy scriptures, which are "able to make us wise "unto eternal salvation;" yet how few love and reverence them, and search them daily! Can any man suppose that the neglect of the sacred oracles, by those who own them to be the word of God, is not contempt of him that inspired them?

The holy sabbath affords the spiritual mind the most important and highly valued opportunity of

and deep contrition, intreats his mercy, and determines to know no other hope.

Before we proceed, let us not forget to think of this gracious Saviour weeping over ungrateful Jerusalem and the miseries to which it was devoted; and praying when nailed on the cross for his murderers, "Father, forgive them, for they "know not what they do." Nor let it be lost sight of, that "Jesus is the same, yesterday, to-"day, and for ever."

The commission and instruction given to his apostles, when he sent them forth to preach the gospel, were perfectly coincident with these encouraging representations of his personal ministry. "Other sheep," he says, "I have, which are not "of this fold: them also I must bring, and they "shall hear my voice, and there shall be one fold, "and one shepherd." "Neither pray I for these "alone, but for them also which shall believe in "me through their word." "Go ye into all the "world, and preach the gospel to every creature: "he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; "and he that believeth not shall be damned."[1]— Indeed what is the commission of Christ to his ministers, in every age, but that expressed in the words of our ordination service? 'To seek for 'Christ's sheep that are dispersed abroad; and 'for his children, who are in the midst of this 'naughty world, that they may be saved through 'Christ for ever.' This we all most solemnly promise to do, when we are admitted to our sacred function; and this must form one grand object of

[1] John x. 16. xvii. 20. Mark xvi. 16.

It is impossible, within the compass of a sermon, protracted even beyond the usual limits with which you are used to indulge me, to enter on all the various particulars that belong to this part of the subject. But the principles, which I have endeavoured to establish, will enable such as seriously desire to re-consider it, to trace it into a vast variety of instances, in which they may find cause to say, "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, "and done this evil in thy sight." It is certain that the subject, if duly attended to, brings in all men guilty before God. "Every mouth," if these views be scriptural, "must be stopped:" we are all "concluded under sin;" and "by the works of "the law shall no flesh be justified before God."

If then we are saved, we must be "justified "freely by the grace of God through the redemp-"tion that is in Christ Jesus." We "must be "born again;" and the whole and every part of the gospel must be to us as "life from the dead." To those who have deeply entered into the views here given in a spirit of diligent self-examination, application by the preacher is needless.

All that earnestness in attending on the word of life and on every means of grace, which some manifest and others object against, arises from this source: and, whenever the objectors become equally sensible of the criminality of every sin, as rebellion against God, they will imitate that conduct which they now censure; Christ will become to them also "the pearl of great price;" they too will "count all but loss for the excellency of the "knowledge of Christ;" nor will they inquire, How often are we bound to pray, or attend the

worship of God? but they will say, "I was glad, "when it was said to me, Let us go into the house "of the Lord." This will put earnestness into their inquiries, and fervency into their prayers; and render Christ and his salvation glorious in their eyes, and precious to their souls.

But, alas! I fear this is by no means the case of all even in this congregation. I am persuaded that many of you, my friends, have never felt this kind and degree of conviction, as to the criminality of your conduct, and the danger of your souls. I cannot impart to you my perceptions of the truths I inculcate: but I would exhort you to search the scriptures, and beg of God, for Christ's sake, to illuminate your minds by his Holy Spirit, to a right understanding of the sacred word, and to a just estimate of your own character and conduct. When this has been duly attended to, you will more nearly agree with me as to the need of regeneration and repentance, of faith in the Son of God, and of every part of scriptural Christianity, than you have hitherto.

The subject before us explains a circumstance, which to many appears strange and unaccountable. The same person who, when careless and inattentive to religion, seemed satisfied with himself, now that he is become earnest about salvation, afraid of all sin, and attentive to every duty, is far removed from self-complacency: so far, that he has a lower opinion of himself than he ever had before! In fact, he judges by a new rule; he views his conduct, as considering himself the subject and deeply-indebted creature of God. He has new sensibilities: he is far more employed than for-

ierly in reviewing his own thoughts, motives, ords, and actions: he sees sin in ten thousand articulars, where before he saw it not. He thinks othing done, because he is so far from having ttained. He judges not by what man takes cogizance of; but by his obligations to that God ho searches the heart. And thus, in his best uties, he feels the need of mercy; and can in othing find encouragement, except from "the glorious gospel of God our Saviour."

Thus deep humility, and a great proficiency in enuine religion, not only go together, but are roportioned to each other, and aid one another's rowth. Thus Christ Jesus, and his atonement, ighteousness, and grace, become more and more alued, as the believer advances in holiness: and hus he daily ripens for the world above; where erfect purity, humility, gratitude, and admiring ove, will dictate the adoration, and enhance the elicity, of the redeemed to all eternity.

But, if hitherto strangers to this salvation and his state of heart, you are still called on to seek 'the blessing from the Lord, and righteousness 'from the God of our salvation:" he is ready to eceive and bless all that come to him on his nercy-seat, through the mediation of his Son. 'Behold, therefore, now is the accepted time; be-'hold now is the day of salvation." "Let the 'wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous 'man his thoughts; and let him return unto the 'Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to 'our God, for he will abundantly pardon."

SERMON XXIII.

ON CHRIST'S LOVE TO PENITENT SINNERS.

LUKE XV. 6.

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"THEN drew near unto Jesus all the publicans "and sinners for to hear him." Persons of bad character, not only in the sight of God, but also in the judgment of men, were so impressed by our Lord's miracles and discourses, that they voluntarily "drew near," not to cavil or scoff, but "to "hear him." Yet, while he compassionately regarded and instructed them, the "Scribes and "Pharisees murmured, saying, This man receiveth "sinners, and eateth with them."

To repress these proud objectors; to illustrate the propriety of his conduct as the Saviour of sinners; and to encourage the penitent, both at that time and in all future ages; our gracious Lord spoke the three parables which stand recorded in this chapter.

We have lately considered the scriptural view of "repentance unto life;" and the majesty and glory of that God against whom we have sinned, with our relations and obligations to him, as aggravating the criminality of our conduct; and have

shewn, that we are all thus brought in guilty before God of numberless and heinous transgressions, whatever be our character among men. These considerations are suited to shew us our need of repentance, of mercy, of the Saviour's atoning blood, and of sanctification by the Holy Spirit. If then our minds be prepared, by a genuine conviction that this is really our state, and these our urgent wants, to welcome the message of the gospel; the present subject, which leads us to consider the love of Christ to lost sinners in general, and to penitents in particular, cannot but be seasonable.

"What man of you," says the condescending Saviour even to his murmuring opposers, "having "an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, will not "leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and "go after that which is lost, until he find it?" The hundred sheep are his valued property: one of them is lost; the rest are safe in the pasture: and his principal care and pains are not employed about the ninety and nine, but about the single sheep that is missing. He leaves the rest as not equally needing his presence, and goes from place to place, with labour and fatigue, to seek after that which is lost: nor does he remit his assiduity, or cease from his anxious search, till at length he finds it. Then he thinks himself well recompensed for his past labour; and "laying it on his "shoulders, rejoicing," he carries it to the fold: and going home "he calleth together his friends "and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with "me; for I have found my sheep which was lost." —What then are we to learn from this parable?

Our Lord himself answers the inquiry, when he adds, "I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be "in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more "than over ninety and nine just persons which "need no repentance."

But who are these "just persons that need no "repentance?" Certainly none on earth have a right to consider themselves as such; but it is equally certain that numbers do not perceive or feel their need of repentance. The murmurs of the Pharisees, whom our Lord addressed, shewed this to be their proud sentiment: and he often spoke to men according to their judgment of themselves, and not according to their real character. The chapter before us contains a remarkable instance of this: for in the parable of the prodigal son the elder brother is introduced, when in a very proud and disobedient spirit, saying, "Lo, "these many years do I serve thee; neither "transgressed I at any time thy commandment:" and his father is afterwards represented as saying, "Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have "is thine:" though it is evident that the parable was intended to rebuke the vain confidence of the proud Pharisees, as well as to encourage humble penitents.

But, should any person doubt respecting this interpretation, we may remember that angels in heaven need no repentance: yet the Saviour's care, and labour, and sufferings, were not employed about them, but in behalf of poor lost sinners on earth: nor does he rejoice over angels, as he does over every sinner that repents.—Even those who have been brought home to his fold,

and are walking in his ordinances and commandments, need not that kind and degree of repentance, which they do who are yet wandering in the broad way: and every new instance of one brought to repentance excites fresh joy in heaven; because the good Shepherd "rejoices that he has found "his sheep that was lost;" and calls on all his friends to rejoice with him.

There are public successes which make whole nations resound with joyful acclamations: yet we are not taught by the sacred oracles to think that the angels of God generally unite in rejoicings of this kind. But, had we been previously informed that one event, and but one, frequently occurs on earth, which fills all heaven with joy and praise, our curiosity would have been excited, our imagination would have been earnestly employed, our expectations would have been raised; and probably we should have felt some disappointment, as well as surprise, when we found it was merely that some poor criminal, perhaps scandalous for his crimes, perhaps neglected because of his low condition or mean abilities, in a cottage, an almshouse, or a prison, was weeping for sin, crying for mercy, and almost overwhelmed with a sense of guilt, and dread of merited condemnation! Yet "there is joy in the presence of the angels of "God, over one sinner that repenteth."

Without entering into a minute interpretation of the parable, we may, from the text, remark three particulars.

I. The event here referred to; "I have found "my sheep which was lost:"

II. The instruction contained in the represen-

tation given, that Christ himself rejoices in this event: "Rejoice *with me:*"

III. The instruction to be derived from the exhortation given to all his friends to rejoice with him.

I. The event, "I have found my sheep which "was lost."

This leads our reflection back to the consideration of all that has been previously done, in order to the finding of the lost sheep; and to the "height, and depth, and length, and breadth of "the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge;" even his love to sinners, considered as strangers to repentance, and living in allowed and heinous disobedience.

We were as sheep going astray, but we have "returned:" (or have been *brought back* or *converted,)* "to the Shepherd and Bishop of our "souls." "I have gone astray," says the Psalm-"ist, like a sheep that is lost." Indeed this is the constant emblem in scripture of our condition, as estranged from God, and seeking happiness from the world. Other views of our state and character shew our criminality, as apostates and rebels, and enemies to God; and are suited to humble us before him: but this especially illustrates our misery and danger. What more helpless and exposed than a lost sheep? It can neither flee from its enemies, nor resist them. It is surrounded with dangers of which it has no dread, and against which it can take no precaution: and, unless again brought under the tender faithful care of the shepherd, it must at length, in one way or other, be destroyed.

In such a world of temptation as this is, if we

believe what the scripture teaches, that "our ad-"versary the devil, like a roaring lion, goeth about "seeking whom he may devour;" and that, as "transformed into an angel of light," he uses, with immense success, a vast variety of artifices to deceive men to their destruction; we shall readily perceive that we are exposed like lost sheep to numberless dangers, of which very few are at all aware, and from which none, left to themselves, could possibly escape.

Such is every man's condition, while living impenitent, having forsaken God, and continuing to walk "according to the course of this world."

When we consider our criminality, we may conceive of the Almighty as looking upon us with just and holy abhorrence: but the emblem of lost sheep gives us the idea of his unspeakable condescension and commiseration.

Let us then consider the love of the great and good Shepherd to us poor lost sheep. He who, in human nature, could with propriety use the words by which JEHOVAH distinguished himself when he appeared to Moses, and say, "Before Abraham "was, I AM:" He who spake to his disciples exactly as JEHOVAH had done to Moses, "Certainly "I will be with thee;" "Lo, I am with you "always, even to the end of the world:" He who could promise to give his disciples "a mouth and "wisdom which no enemy could gainsay or re-"sist:" He whom "all angels worship," came into the world, was made "in the likeness of "men," "became flesh," and tabernacled among us. But what brought him down from the realms of light? Love! not to our character or conduct,

but love to us as lost sinners! He pitied our wretchedness, while he abhorred our crimes! He anticipated even our desires, and our consciousness of misery and danger! "It is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ "Jesus came into the world to save sinners;— "even the chief of sinners." "Ye know the "grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, how that, though "he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, "that ye, through his poverty, might be made "rich."

When he thus assumed "the form of a servant," from compassion to the lost and wretched, he did not appear in a state of outward splendour, but in the deepest poverty; and, while he refused to act as a judge, and shunned those who would have made him a king; yet, as the tender Shepherd seeking his lost sheep, he performed, and so dignified, the office of a preacher, by making that his peculiar constant employment.

With weary, toilsome steps, he traversed the whole land of Israel; (a stranger to those accommodations with which the most of us are indulged;) and made it the business of his life to seek out and save the lost. He pitied the ignorant and neglected, "because they were as sheep not "having a shepherd;" and allowed himself no space for rest or refreshment, (often reserving only the hours of night for secret devotion,) that he might lose no opportunity of bringing lost sheep to the fold of God. This was "his meat," his pleasure, and his joy: and here, especially, he hath left his ministers "an example that they "should follow his steps." This was the business

of his life: still more this was the end of his agony and death. "All we, like sheep," (says the prophet, above seven hundred years before the Saviour's birth,) "All we, like sheep, have gone "astray; we have turned every one to his own "way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity "of us all." "He was led like a lamb to the "slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearer is "dumb, so he opened not his mouth." In like manner another prophet, in the name of God says, "Awake, O sword, against my Shepherd, against "the man that is my fellow, saith the Lord of "Hosts; smite the Shepherd." And thus Christ, taking these prophecies as belonging to him, says, "I am the good Shepherd; the good Shepherd "layeth down his life for the sheep."—View then, the incarnate Word and Son of God, Immanuel, agonizing in the garden, and expiring on the cross; not for sinners as already repenting, but to make way for their repentance and salvation! Oh, the depth of his condescension and compassion! the riches of his liberality! the greatness of his self-denying love! Words fail, and even imagination is lost on such a subject.—But can we suppose that he stooped so low, and laboured and suffered so much, for sinners, while impenitently rebellious; and then that he will, after all, reject any of those who in consequence are brought humbly to seek his salvation? Consider him as stooping, and bleeding, and dying, for the vilest of rebels and enemies: and then conceive him, if you can, sternly rejecting the humble requests of the poor supplicant who with tears and confusion,

and deep contrition, intreats his mercy, and determines to know no other hope.

Before we proceed, let us not forget to think of this gracious Saviour weeping over ungrateful Jerusalem and the miseries to which it was devoted; and praying when nailed on the cross for his murderers, "Father, forgive them, for they "know not what they do." Nor let it be lost sight of, that "Jesus is the same, yesterday, to-"day, and for ever."

The commission and instruction given to his apostles, when he sent them forth to preach the gospel, were perfectly coincident with these encouraging representations of his personal ministry. "Other sheep," he says, "I have, which are not "of this fold: them also I must bring, and they "shall hear my voice, and there shall be one fold, "and one shepherd." "Neither pray I for these "alone, but for them also which shall believe in "me through their word." "Go ye into all the "world, and preach the gospel to every creature: "he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; "and he that believeth not shall be damned."[1]— Indeed what is the commission of Christ to his ministers, in every age, but that expressed in the words of our ordination service? 'To seek for 'Christ's sheep that are dispersed abroad; and 'for his children, who are in the midst of this 'naughty world, that they may be saved through 'Christ for ever.' This we all most solemnly promise to do, when we are admitted to our sacred function; and this must form one grand object of

[1] John x. 16. xvii. 20. Mark xvi. 16.

all our subsequent ministrations, if we would fulfil the vows of God that are upon us.

And what are our instructions in this great concern? We are commanded to preach "repentance "towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus "Christ:" to assure our hearers of every character, that "all things are ready; to invite, persuade, expostulate, "instantly, in season, out of season;" and even "to compel them to come in;" certainly by no other compulsion than that of convincing arguments, urgent persuasions, and reiterated exhortations. "Now then we are ambassadors for "Christ; as though God did beseech you by us, "we pray you, in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled "to God."—"We also as fellow-workers together "with him, beseech you also that ye receive not "the grace of God in vain."

We are instructed, not only to inform you of what God has done for the salvation of sinners, and of what Christ has suffered for sins, and of his prevailing intercession for all "who come to "God by him;" not only to propose these blessings to you: but also to urge most earnestly your acceptance of them; to take no denial; to renew our invitations and expostulations; to venture your displeasure and contempt, in seeking your salvation; and never to remit or cease from our endeavours, till you forsake our ministry, or either you or we are called to the tribunal of God.

And what is that peculiar work of the Holy Spirit, of which so much is said in the scriptures, especially in the New Testament, and of which, alas! so little is heard from many pulpits in this Chris-

tian country? "He shall convince the world of "sin, of righteousness, and of judgment." "He "shall glorify me; for he shall receive of mine, "and shall shew it unto you." His first work, as proceeding from the Father and the Son, consists in "quickening the dead in sin," bringing the prodigal to himself, humbling the proud heart, subduing the stout spirit, awakening the careless conscience, and shewing the criminal his guilt, the justice of God in his condemnation, and the future judgment, with all its solemnities and awful consequences. When this has been effected, and the convinced transgressor is brought to despair of salvation, except through mercy alone, by faith in Christ Jesus; the same effectual Teacher "glo-"rifies the Saviour," shews the suitableness, fulness, and freeness of his salvation, and brings the desponding penitent to "count all but loss for the "excellency of the knowledge of Christ," and of his atonement and righteousness.

This then is the fact referred to in the text. The sinner hears the gospel, is brought to repentance, to submission, to earnest desires of salvation, to a cordial acceptance of Christ, according to the degree of knowledge already attained, and to diligent search after more competent instruction in the truth and will of God.

The persons, thus become humble and earnest, may have been previously of divers characters, some more and some less moral; the degrees of their capacity or information may widely differ; and also their rank and station in society: but they now all understand the apostle's language,

which before they either overlooked or disliked, "There is no difference, for all have sinned, and "come short of the glory of God."

When Peter addressed the Jews on the day of Pentecost, and thousands embraced the gospel, even of those who had concurred in crucifying the Lord of glory; then this joyful event took place in numerous instances. The good Shepherd found and rejoiced over his lost sheep. When the poor gaoler began, trembling, to cry out, "What must "I do to be saved?" and gladly welcomed the message of the gospel; it was a single but illustrious instance of the same kind. We are not favoured with such success as Peter witnessed; but from time to time, one and another, like the gaoler, makes the interesting inquiry, and welcomes the scriptural answer. And, whether one obscure person in a cottage or a prison is converted, or ten thousand are converted at once; not a single instance is overlooked: Christ rejoices over his lost sheep, and calls on us to rejoice likewise.

II. What then do we learn from this expression, "Rejoice *with me?*"—We may suppose the penitent, not only bowed down by a sense of past guilt, but oppressed by feeling much remaining stoutness of spirit and hardness of heart; which, though not before aware of, he now begins to perceive and lament. Perhaps he recollects, not merely outward sins, but (which is often the case with moral persons,) a proud contempt of the doctrines and ministry of the gospel, and many sarcastical remarks on pious persons, that lie with peculiar weight upon the conscience. Many

of provocations and disappointments; who had persevered for a long course of time, while the case seemed hopeless: would he not rejoice, when his endeavours were crowned with full success? Surely he could not see the repenting rebel a suppliant at his feet, confessing his crimes with all their aggravations, and most submissively imploring forgiveness and reconciliation, though ready to fear a repulse, without the most lively emotions of satisfaction. It is impossible, but he must inwardly rejoice; unless he, who had the heart of a father while the son was a rebel, could be turned into a monster when his son became a penitent. Prudence indeed might dictate the outward expressions of his joy, and that perhaps in a way not quite so pleasing to the suppliant's feelings; but, beyond all doubt, they would be directed to the promoting of his permanent advantage.

We learn then from the expression, "Rejoice "*with me*," that the penitent sinner is sure to find a cordial welcome from him who "came to seek "and to save that which was lost."

All the love of Christ to sinners, which has been before considered; all the means used, and the divine influence of the Holy Spirit communicated, in order to bring them to a sense of their guilt and danger, and to render them willing to accept of this salvation; are so many demonstrations that no one, however guilty or enslaved by sin, shall be rejected when thus brought to seek mercy and grace as proposed in the gospel The prodigal is at length induced to say, "I will go to my father, "and say unto him, Father, I have sinned against "heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy

"to be called thy son:" and will the father now spurn him from him, and leave him at last to perish? No: "He looketh upon men, and if any "say, I have sinned, and perverted that which was "right, and it profited me not; he will deliver his "soul from going down into the pit, and his life "shall see the light."[1] The good Shepherd has regained his lost sheep, and says to his friends and neighbours, "Rejoice with me, for I have found "my sheep that was lost." And if any, like the Pharisees, and the elder brother in the parable, object, and find fault, he will vindicate his own proceedings, and put them to shame and silence.

Certainly this is the view of the subject, which these parables, spoken for that very purpose, are suited to convey: and the general tenour of scripture accords to it. How emphatical the language of God by his prophet concerning Ephraim! "I "have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself "thus: Thou hast chastised me, and I was chas-"tised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke. "Turn thou me, and I shall be turned, for thou "art the Lord my God.—Is Ephraim my dear son? "Is he a pleasant child? For since I spake against "him, I do earnestly remember him still. There-"fore my bowels are troubled for him. I will "surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord."[2]

Indeed the kindness and condescension of Christ, as recorded in the gospel, during his personal ministry, were entirely coincident with these representations. He never despised or frowned on any one who came to him, however mean or vile; but

[1] Job. xxxiii. 27, 28. [2] Jer. xxxi. 18—20.

was always accessible and compassionate: and in this, as in all other respects, he "hath left us an "example that we should follow his steps."

Simon, the Pharisee, disdained "the woman "that was a sinner," when, as a weeping penitent, she washed our Lord's "feet with tears, and wiped "them with the hairs of her head." But he graciously noticed the evidences of her faith and love: he declared that "her sins, though many, were "forgiven:" he said to her, "thy faith hath saved "thee, go in peace."

In like manner, when censured for becoming the guest of Zaccheus the publican; having heard his profession of penitent faith, he declared for his encouragement, "This day is salvation come to "this house; for as much as he also is a son of "Abraham: for the Son of man is come to seek "and to save that which was lost." And even to the thief upon the cross, who confessed his guilt, and said, "Lord, remember me when thou comest "in thy kingdom;" amidst his own agonizing tortures he replied, "Verily, I say unto thee, this day "shalt thou be with me in paradise."

This uniform conduct of our blessed Saviour, towards those who were humbly sensible of their guilt and danger, appears still more remarkable and instructive, if contrasted with his addresses to the self-sufficient Scribes and Pharisees; in which he uses the strongest language of just severity and authoritative rebuke: "Verily, I say unto you, "that the publicans and harlots shall enter into the "kingdom of heaven before you." "Ye serpents, "ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the "damnation of hell?" There is in some men a

sort of indolent easiness of temper, which induces an indiscriminate kindness to persons of all characters, at least as far as words can go: but the marked difference of address, which our Lord made use of, in speaking to the self-righteous and to the humble penitent, forms such a contrast, that we are sure there must be, *in his judgment*, something essentially different in the state of their hearts, which according to the plan of the gospel requires this marked discrimination.

When Saul of Tarsus, being met with in the way to Damascus, became a humble suppliant, the compassionate Saviour whom he had persecuted takes notice of it to Ananias, "Behold he prayeth." And Ananias, sent expressly to assure him of pardon and peace, and to restore his sight as a pledge of further mercies, accosts this wolf, which had so cruelly destroyed the sheep of Christ, with the cordial address, "Brother, Saul, the Lord, even Jesus "whom thou sawest in the way, hath sent me unto "thee." It is probable that Saul, during his three days' weeping and fasting, in darkness and distress, had feared lest he had sinned beyond the reach of mercy: but no objections were made against him on account of his past most atrocious crimes; and, as soon as he began to repent, and was willing to be saved in the way of the gospel, he was heartily welcomed, both by the Lord and by his ministers.

The Old Testament affords an instance no less extraordinary. Manasseh had filled Jerusalem with abominable idolatries, and with innocent blood; he had persisted and increased in wickedness beyond example, in defiance of warnings sent

from God by his prophets; he had used his authority to induce his people to comply with his abominations; and, yet, when "in affliction he besought "the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly "before the God of his fathers; he was intreated "of him, and heard his supplication."

But the parable, in this chapter, of the prodigal son, which has been repeatedly alluded to, is perhaps the most decisive on the subject that can be conceived. It was spoken on purpose to encourage the penitent, and to reprove those who disdained them. No sooner is the prodigal, whose conduct had been most base, brought to himself, and induced to return home, than the father sees him afar off, runs to meet him, prevents his confessions and intreaties, hastens to speak peace and comfort to his dejected heart, and welcomes him with every token of affection and joy.

The Lord indeed often leaves the awakened sinner for a time "to sow in tears," and "tremble "at his word;" in order "to humble and prove "him, and to do him good at the latter end:" but if truly penitent, if "he goeth forth and weepeth, "bearing precious seed, he shall doubtless come "again rejoicing, and bring his sheaves with him." He may for a season mourn in darkness, and fear lest his case be hopeless; but ere long he shall say, "O Lord, I will praise thee; though thou wast "angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and "thou comfortest me. Behold God is become my "salvation: I will trust and not be afraid; for the "Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song, he "also is become my salvation. Therefore with

"joy shall ye draw waters out of the wells of sal-
"vation."[1]

Whatever then is needful of instruction, pardon, sanctification, strength, liberty, or comfort, shall in due time be vouchsafed; and the Lord himself will rejoice over the poor penitent to do him good, "to the praise of the glory of his grace." For, "where sin has abounded, grace much more "abounds."—I proceed then,

III. To consider what we may learn from the call given us to rejoice with the good Shepherd, when he has found his sheep that was lost.

I apprehend that this call was not merely intended as an additional encouragement to the poor trembling and mourning penitent, though it is exceedingly suited to answer this end; but also to teach us some important parts of our duty, which we are too apt to overlook.—If indeed we "have "fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before "us" in the gospel; if we have found "peace and "joy in believing," and "have tasted that the Lord "is gracious;" it should be one grand aim and design of our future lives, by all proper means to induce others to seek a share in the same inestimable blessings. This is by no means *exclusively* the work of ministers: it is the duty of all Christians, in their families and neighbourhood; among their relatives and connexions; in their sphere of action, whether contracted or more extended; and according to the talents committed to their stewardship.

"Let this mind be in you which was also in

[1] Isai. xii. 3.

own mind, as to his proper place and work, and should act consistently with his engagements; not "doing evil that good may come," or even causing, by any impropriety, "his good to be evil "spoken of." But, if we candidly look around us, and take a large view of the Christian church, we shall evidently perceive that God brings home lost sheep, and so causes "joy in heaven," by persons who are very far from exactly coinciding with us, in those things on which we perhaps lay an undue stress. It is too much for us to assume it, *as fact*, that our views are exclusively scriptural; for other conscientious men are equally confident in their opinions: and, if we were sure that we were right and they mistaken, yet as the only wise God sees good to execute a part of his counsel by their means; and as "there is joy in heaven over one "sinner that repenteth;" it does not become us to manifest the pharisaical spirit of the elder brother, who was objecting and complaining, when his father and the whole family were feasting, and rejoicing over "him who had been lost and was "found, had been dead and was alive."

St. Paul was sure that they who preached Christ out of envy and strife were wrong, not only in circumstances, but in the radical temper of their hearts: yet, as it seemed that they preached the substance of the true gospel among those who had been strangers to it; so that sinners were by their means brought to repentance and faith in Christ; he determined to rejoice in their success: doubtless because the Saviour calls on all his friends to rejoice with him when he "finds his lost sheep." As to consequences, he left them with God; as

also the judgment to be awarded to those who wanted "to add affliction to his bonds."

We also learn, from the language of the text, that we should, with proper caution, encourage every relenting in those who have hitherto appeared stout-hearted and far from righteousness. We should meet with kindness and meekness every dawning of light and conviction, and spare no pains in leading forward the newly awakened sinner, notwithstanding his mistakes, prejudices, or ignorance; imitating him who "did not quench the "smoking flax, or break the bruised reed." It is indeed proper to avoid such encouraging language as may tend to self-deception: but whatever can inspire the hope which animates to diligence; whatever can tend "to lift up the hands that hang "down, and to confirm the feeble knees; or to "make straight paths for the feet, that that which "is lame may not be turned out of the way, but "rather be healed;" should be perseveringly attempted. "Him that is weak in the faith receive "ye; but not to doubtful disputations."

We should also be reminded to attend to another apostolical injunction which is often forgotten: "If a man be overtaken in a fault, ye that are "spiritual restore such an one in the spirit of "meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also "be tempted." For the recovery of one, who seemed in our judgment to be a believer, is often that very event over which angels and the Lord of angels rejoice. "Brethren, if any of you do "err from the truth, and one convert him; let "him know that he which converteth the sinner "from the error of his way shall save a soul from

"death, and shall hide a multitude of sins."—Let us, in these and all other cases, connected with the joyful event referred to in the text, use all the means we can, and pray fervently for a blessing on every attempt made by others, as well as by ourselves, all over the world. Let us expect to receive answers to our prayers, and stand prepared to bless and praise God, whenever we hear of sinners brought to repentance, and of the success of that cause, for which Christ Jesus came into the world and shed his blood upon the cross.

Brethren, you have heard many things concerning the love of Christ to sinners, in general, and to repenting sinners in particular; and of his unspeakable condescension, compassion, and loving kindness: but do not on this ground conclude that he cannot, or will not punish. "Despisest "thou the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, "and long suffering, not knowing that the good-"ness of God leadeth thee to repentance? but, "after thy hardness and impenitent heart, trea-"surest up unto thyself wrath against the day of "wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment "of God; who shall render to every one accord-"ing to his deeds?"—Notwithstanding the inexpressible love of Christ, he will at length "be "revealed from heaven, with his mighty angels, "in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that "know not God, and that obey not his gospel; "who shall be punished with everlasting destruc-"tion from his presence." "How shall we then "escape, if we neglect so great salvation?" They, who are emboldened by the grace of the gospel

to continue impenitent, will perish with the most aggravated condemnation. "Seek the Lord," therefore, "while he may be found; call upon him "while he is near:" and beware of trusting in any transient impressions, which leave no abiding effect on your general temper and conduct; for no persons are more hopeless in their impenitence, than they who groundlessly think that they have repented. Yet be thankful for any degree of *feeling*, any disposition to relent and submit to God: but give diligence, and exercise watchfulness, that these convictions may be rendered deeper, and made more effectual in producing "works meet for repentance."

We, who cannot see the heart, must encourage whatever appears right: but you should look to God to search and examine you, that you may become acquainted with yourselves, and not be deceived by a repentance which must eventually be repented of. Take care, in this view, of every scheme which tends to reconcile religion with conformity to the world; and of all smooth and soothing ways of stating the great truths of Christianity. Whatever your conscience declares should be broken off, given up, or attended to; obey its dictates promptly and implicitly. And in this way, no doubt, you will be led forward to establishment in the faith and hope of the gospel.

If any have had impressions that have subsided, without producing a real change, they must begin all over again. And, here no particular directions seem needful, except not to yield to the discouraging thought that it is now too late. Still, still it is said, "To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden

nicate, by his powerful agency, that redemption which he purchased on the cross. Thus 'the Holy 'Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son:' as St. John in vision saw "a pure river of the water "of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the "throne of God, and of the Lamb."[1]

The gift of the Holy Spirit, as stated in scripture, is twofold: his immediate inspiration made men prophets; his regenerating and sanctifying influences make men "saints," or holy persons.—These are perfectly distinct endowments. The most of those who have been, and are, made holy persons have had no prophetical or miraculous gifts bestowed on them: nor can any sober man suppose that every one, who would pray for the Holy Spirit, should be made a prophet, or enabled to work miracles. On the other hand, some prophets were not saints: they received the Spirit of prophecy, for the use of others, but not that of sanctification to the saving of their own souls.[2] We therefore entirely disclaim all pretensions to the Holy Spirit in respect of his miraculous and prophetical gifts: we neither expect, nor teach others to expect, any such thing. In this sense the Holy Spirit is not now given, or promised: and if any persons inadvertently use language capable of being understood as a claim of this kind, we would enter a protest against it, as inaccurate, and of bad tendency, however well meant.

We do not expect that the Holy Spirit will be given, in answer to our prayers, to inform us immediately, as by a whisper, when either awake or

[1] Rev. xxii. 1. [2] Matt. vii. 21, 22.

asleep, that we are the children of God; or to lead us to this conclusion by any impression or new revelation; or in any other way than by enabling us to exercise repentance, and faith, and love to God and our neighbour. Here again we allow that enthusiasm has often found admission, and has done great mischief.

God inspired holy men of old to write the scriptures, "as they were moved by the Holy Ghost:" and, while we would teach you to depend on the same Spirit to guide you into the true meaning of the scriptures; we would by no means allow that he ever reveals any thing contrary to the written word, or more than is contained in it, or through any other medium. Now, should any impression be made on the mind of a covetous man, an adulterer, or any other impenitent sinner, that his sins are pardoned, and that he is a child of God and an heir of heaven; it would contradict the scriptures, which expressly declare that such characters are in the road to destruction. But the Holy Spirit cannot contradict himself; and therefore such impressions must come from "Satan, trans-"formed into an angel of light."

If any impression lead men from the scriptures, to form some other ground of hope, or rule of conduct, than is there given: it adds to the word of God, and indeed contradicts it, and must therefore be a delusion.

If any one thinks he is led by the Holy Spirit immediately, and in the neglect of the means of grace; or that he has now no longer occasion, as being under a higher influence, "to search the "scriptures;" or that his views are not to be

who of old cried with tears, "Lord, I believe, help "thou mine unbelief;" and your sorrow shall in due time be "turned into joy." And may God of his infinite mercy, grant that all present may be found among those, over whom Christians and Ministers rejoice; over whom Christ rejoices; and who shall rejoice with him, and in his love and presence, to all eternity! Amen.

SERMON XXIV.

ON THE PROMISE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

LUKE XI. 13.

If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?

In the former part of this chapter our blessed Saviour teaches his disciples to pray; and encourages them, in the most affecting manner, to earnestness and importunity in prayer. With what energy do the illustrations, used on the occasion, address the feelings of our hearts! "If a son "shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, "will he give him a stone, Or if he ask a fish, "will he for a fish give him a serpent? Or if he "shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion?"

And while every one who heard him must find his heart revolt against a conduct so contrary to parental affection, he added the words of our text: "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good "gifts unto your children, how much more shall "your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to "them that ask him?" It is not said, to his children, but "to them that ask him;" that the asking itself might be a ground of encouragement

to every supplicant. In a parallel passage the concluding words are, "How much more shall "your Father which is in heaven give *good things* "to them that ask him?"[1] But here the Holy Spirit is promised, as the best gift of God to those that are favoured with the gospel, and indeed as comprehending all things which are truly and essentially "good" for them.

"God made man in his own image, after his "own likeness." He had before pronounced each part of the creation "good;" but when man had been formed, and placed in dominion over the other creatures, he pronounced the whole to be "very good." Yet here our Lord, addressing his own disciples, speaks of them, and of men in general, as evil: "if then ye *being* evil." We are informed, in the third chapter of Genesis, how "by "one man sin entered into the world, and death "by sin." Thus man became as "clay marred in "the hand of the potter:" and soon after we read, "God saw that the wickedness of man was great "in the earth; and that every imagination of the "thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. "And it repented the Lord that he had made man "on the earth; and it grieved him at his heart." "God looked upon the earth, and behold it was "corrupt: for all flesh had corrupted his way upon "the earth."[2] Accordingly he destroyed the whole depraved race, except righteous Noah and his family: yet, directly after the deluge, he testified that "the imagination of man's heart is evil from "his youth." Undoubtedly then some vast change

[1] Matt. vii. 11.

[2] Gen. vi. 5—12.

had taken place in the human character, since the time when "God created man in his own image," and pronounced him "very good."

This change, this fallen state of human nature, this depravity, called in scripture "death in tres- "passes and sins," made way for "the glorious "gospel of God our Saviour," which was predicted in emphatical but obscure language immediately after the fall. For it pleased God to take occasion from man's apostacy to glorify the riches of his mercy and grace, in harmony with his justice, holiness, and truth, in saving us poor miserable sinners.—Now the promise of the Redeemer, ("God manifest in the flesh,") through whose person, righteousness, atonement, and mediation, redemption was made and salvation proclaimed, is the grand promise of the Old Testament. "The "testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." In like manner, the atonement being made, the everlasting righteousness brought in, the Redeemer glorified, "the way into the holiest" manifested, and the gospel published; the promise of the Holy Spirit may justly be considered as the grand and peculiar promise of the New Testament: for, in fact, what else is wanting to complete our recovery to God and holiness?—Thus in our admirable litany we have this morning been praying to the divine Saviour, 'By the mystery of thy Holy in- 'carnation; by thy holy nativity and circumcision; 'by thy baptism, fasting, and temptation; by 'thine agony and bloody sweat; by thy cross 'and passion; by thy precious death and burial; 'by thy glorious resurrection and ascension; and

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[1] Rev. xxii. 1. [2] Matt. vii. 21, 22.

asleep, that we are the children of God; or to lead us to this conclusion by any impression or new revelation; or in any other way than by enabling us to exercise repentance, and faith, and love to God and our neighbour. Here again we allow that enthusiasm has often found admission, and has done great mischief.

God inspired holy men of old to write the scriptures, "as they were moved by the Holy Ghost:" and, while we would teach you to depend on the same Spirit to guide you into the true meaning of the scriptures; we would by no means allow that he ever reveals any thing contrary to the written word, or more than is contained in it, or through any other medium. Now, should any impression be made on the mind of a covetous man, an adulterer, or any other impenitent sinner, that his sins are pardoned, and that he is a child of God and an heir of heaven; it would contradict the scriptures, which expressly declare that such characters are in the road to destruction. But the Holy Spirit cannot contradict himself; and therefore such impressions must come from "Satan, transformed into an angel of light."

If any impression lead men from the scriptures, to form some other ground of hope, or rule of conduct, than is there given: it adds to the word of God, and indeed contradicts it, and must therefore be a delusion.

If any one thinks he is led by the Holy Spirit immediately, and in the neglect of the means of grace; or that he has now no longer occasion, as being under a higher influence, "to search the scriptures;" or that his views are not to be

judged by the oracles of God, soberly interpreted as the standard of truth; he is evidently deluded. "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak "not according to this word, it is because they "have no light in them." Even prophets and apostles searched the scriptures extant in their days, and uniformly appealed to them; and our Lord, in promising the Holy Spirit to his disciples, "to lead them into all truth," adds, "He shall "bring to your remembrance whatever I have "spoken unto you."[1]

The Holy Spirit is not promised to render us infallible: and they who, professing a great dependence on his influence, refuse to preach or pray, except as moved by the Spirit, (probably without being aware of it,) advance a claim to infallibility, whenever they thus speak either to God or to man. Whatever is uttered at those times is actually made the dictates and words of the Holy Spirit, and put upon an equality with the language of scripture! But surely it is more becoming for us to do our best, as opportunities offer, and to ascribe all that is true or good to the Holy Spirit, taking the blame of all that is erroneous or defective upon ourselves! All such claims, however, as imply exemption from mistake or sin, we utterly disallow, as arrogant and enthusiastic; and only desire to have our principles and actions candidly judged of by the holy scriptures.

We observe also, that we are incapable of distinguishing the influences of the Holy Spirit from the exercises of our own faculties, except as every

[1] John xiv. 26.

thing holy is considered as coming from his agency, every thing unholy from our evil nature. In fact, there is no actual and entire distinction; except when he acts as a Spirit of prophecy. For all we are taught to expect is this, that he will dispose and enable us to exercise the understanding and faculties, which God hath given us, in a holy and wise manner. He who is left to himself, or under the influence of that "spirit which worketh in the "children of disobedience," acts freely and without compulsion; his faculties being distempered by sinful passions, as the eye or the ear by disease. And he who is brought under the influence of the Holy Spirit experiences no compulsion or violence; but the mind, being delivered from the effect of delusion and sinful passions, perceives things in a new light, and most willingly makes a new and holy choice. "I know," says the apostle, "that in me, "that is in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing."[1] If then, humbly examining ourselves by the sacred word, we become conscious of desires and affections, and perform actions, in which there is something truly good; we may conclude that this is effected "by the Spirit which dwelleth in us." And we may also learn to depend on the promise of the text, in whatever we attempt in obedience to the call of the gospel.

Again, we must not suppose that the Holy Spirit is promised or given in order that we may do any thing which was not before our duty. We ought always to have loved God with our whole heart, and our neighbour as ourselves: having sinned,

[1] Rom. vii. 18.

we ought to repent: and, being favoured with the gospel, we ought to believe, to pray, to submit to God, to return to him, and to walk in all his ordinances and commandments. But we are not of ourselves disposed or able to do this: and the Holy Spirit is promised to "work in us to will and "to do" according to these our obligations. So that the dispositions and actions, which are really good in the sight of God, are not called in scripture moral virtues, but "the fruits of the Spirit."

If these things be kept in mind, most of the objections, often made to our doctrine in this particular, fall to the ground, and are evidently opposed to opinions which we totally disallow and protest against.

II. I proceed more directly to shew what is implied in the promise before us.

Man, created in the divine image, was alive to God and holiness: but, as his natural life was necessarily dependent on the providential support of his Creator, so his spiritual life was preserved by the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. In the day that he ate of the forbidden fruit he died; the Holy Spirit quitted his polluted temple, and man became "dead in trespasses and sins."

By the fall, he did not lose his rational capacities, though they were no doubt greatly impaired, and rendered far less capable than before of governing his animal propensities: but he lost his spiritual life, his capacity of taking delight in God and heavenly things; and consequently he became an apostate and an idolater, seeking satisfaction in the enjoyment of worldly objects.

This is universally the condition of man, as unregenerate: so that the greatest philosopher is as entire a stranger to the delight which an angel enjoys in loving and adoring God, as the mere animal is to that pleasure which the philosopher experiences, whilst successfully investigating the objects of nature.

It is then the first part of the gracious office performed by the Holy Spirit, to "quicken the "dead in sin;" to raise fallen man 'from the death 'of sin to a life of righteousness;' and to restore him to the capacity of loving and delighting in God and his worship and service. And on this account the Holy Spirit is called in the Nicene creed, 'The author and giver of life.' "Ye must be "born again." "Except a man be born again, of "water and of the Spirit, he cannot see," "he "cannot enter into, the kingdom of God." For the baptism of water is no more than 'an outward 'and visible sign of an inward and spiritual 'grace;' which 'inward and spiritual grace is a 'death unto sin, and a new birth unto righteous-'ness.' And to ascribe this change of our condition to the outward sign, preserves indeed "the "form of godliness," but "denies the power of it." If then we, though natives of a Christian country, are 'born in sin and the children of wrath;' as we are expressly taught by our Church catechism; we must as much need the quickening influences of the Holy Spirit, as they did to whom Christ and his apostles first preached the gospel.

The same divine Agent is spoken of in scripture as the Spirit of truth and wisdom, as the author and giver of all spiritual knowledge, and as illumi-

Holy Spirit. Nay, we have ground to think that the felicity of heaven will not arise independently, from external situation, or the state of our minds, but also from the immediate influences of this Holy Comforter. For our Lord, evidently speaking of the Holy Spirit, says, "The water that I shall give "him shall be in him a well of water, springing "up into everlasting life."

With these things in our view, let us return to the promise of the text. "If ye, being evil, know "how to give good gifts unto your children, how "much more shall your heavenly Father give the "Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" God is far more ready to give his Holy Spirit to them that ask him, than any parent is to give bread to a starving supplicating child! as much more ready, as his goodness transcends that of fallen man! as his riches exceed our poverty! Surely human language is incapable of expressing any thing more forcibly. Parents may be destitute of natural affection; paternal kindness may be wearied out by repeated provocations; and often a father must greatly deny himself while he supplies the wants of his children: yet so strong are the feelings of a parent, that, depraved as men are, few can bear to see their children in distress, without relieving them: "How much more then will your heavenly "Father give his Holy Spirit to them that ask "him!" Our Lord illustrates his meaning in this promise by his address to the woman of Samaria, at that time an immoral character: "If thou "knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith "unto thee, give me to drink; thou wouldest have

And indeed, if, notwithstanding external advantages, "we be by nature the children of wrath "even as others:" if, "our understanding being "darkened, we be alienated from the life of God "through the ignorance that is in us, because of "the blindness of our hearts:" then it is certain that we need this inward illumination of the Holy Spirit, even as much as they did to whom the gospel was first preached; not to reveal new doctrines, but to free our minds from the effects of our various prejudices and corrupt passions, that we may discern spiritual things, and understand the nature and glory of revealed truth.

"When He," says our Lord, speaking of the promised Comforter, "is come, he will convince "the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of "judgment."[1] These are part of the effects which follow from his divine illumination. When freed from the power of our proud and carnal prejudices, we are led to scriptural views of the perfections, law, and government of God, and our relations and obligations to him; we begin to form a right judgment of ourselves, of our past conduct, and of the present disposition of our hearts. This produces a conviction of our sinful state and character, an inquiry after the way in which man may be justified before God, and a serious expectation of the future judgment. And, when this conviction is rendered deep and permanent, it prepares the soul for understanding and welcoming the revelation of the gospel, "submitting to the righteousness of God," and "counting all but loss for the excellency of the

[1] John xvi. 8.

doctrine of scripture, which has been set before you, he would certainly be brought to repentance, to the knowledge of Christ, and faith in him; to hope, rejoice, love, obey, and "worship in spirit "and truth;" and at length to join the worshippers before the throne of God, in their exalted adorations, and ineffable felicity!—Let us then,

III. Consider the suitableness of this promise to our condition, and to the state of things in this evil world.

Considered without the gospel, in what a deplorable condition are all mankind! We scarcely need look into the Bible to ascertain this, if we attend properly to what passes around and within us. What a strange aversion do we see in others, and feel in ourselves, to the worship and service of God, which, it is highly reasonable to conclude, constitute the felicity of heaven! How constantly, and almost universally, has the grossest idolatry, the most absurd superstition, or the wildest enthusiasm, obtained the preference to the holy character, worship, commandments, and doctrines of the one living and true God! How generally has irreligion, or antiscriptural religion, prevailed on earth! How powerful the propensity in mankind to idolize the world and the things of the world; and to forget and neglect the God of heaven! "The carnal "mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject "to the law of God, neither indeed can be." Who can help *seeing*, yea *feeling*, that this is man's real character?

It is equally evident that he is proud of his reasoning faculties, and of all the gifts which God hath

glect, nay contempt, with which the doctrine of the Holy Spirit is generally treated?

"I will," saith the Lord by his prophet, "pour "upon the house of David and the inhabitants of "Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and of supplications, "and they shall look upon me whom they have "pierced and mourn."[1] Hence we learn that true repentance, faith in a crucified Saviour, and a heart prepared for fervent prayer, are the effects of the Spirit being poured out upon any people: and surely it is as necessary that we should mourn over our sins and be humbled for them, and by faith look unto Christ, and lift up our hearts in prayer, as it was that the Jews should do so. Indeed the expression "praying by the Spirit," or "praying in the Holy Ghost," is commonly used in the New Testament, however at present not unfrequently treated with profane ridicule. It certainly does not mean praying *extempore*, (as some imagine;) for men may learn to pray in this manner without the sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit; and he very often enables those who use a form to lift up their hearts with fervency unto God. In short, whatever words be used, we never pray spiritually, except as the Holy Spirit enables us truly to desire the blessings we implore, and so to exercise faith in the promises of God through Jesus Christ, as to expect that our prayers will be answered. And when these desires become fervent, and these expectations very lively, "the Spirit "helpeth our infirmities, and we pray with groan-

[1] Zech. xii. 10.

"ings which cannot be uttered." Our longings and hopes are greater than any words can express; while the language of the formalist vastly exceeds his real meaning.

"Now the God of hope fill you with all peace "and joy in believing, that ye may abound in "hope by the power of the Holy Ghost."[1] And "now abideth faith, hope, and love; but the "greatest of these is love."[2] If then these graces were to *abide* in the church when miraculous gifts ceased; surely we need the Holy Spirit to create and preserve them in our hearts, at least as much as the apostles and primitive Christians did.—"The "fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long suffer-"ing, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, tem-"perance." His "fruit is in all goodness, and "righteousness, and truth." "The love of God is "shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost." "Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the "truth, through the Spirit, unto unfeigned love of "the brethren." "If ye through the Spirit do "mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live." What are we to understand by this language? Is it all little or nothing to us? Is it not necessary that we should love God and one another? Are meekness and temperance no longer requisite? Or are our natures so much better than those of the primitive Christians, that we are of ourselves inclined and able to perform those things, which they even in an age of miracles could not attain to except by the Holy Spirit? Let the character of mod-

[1] Rom. xv. 13. [2] 1 Cor. xiii. 13.

ern Christians at large, compared with that of the ancient church, supply an answer to these questions.

In a word, "If any man have not the Spirit of "Christ, he is none of his."[1] All true believers are "led by the Spirit;" "live in the Spirit;" "walk in the Spirit;" and are "a habitation of "God through the Spirit." "What, know ye "not that ye are the temple of God; and that "the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?" 'Certainly 'then you are very ignorant of real Christianity, 'and strangers to the distinguishing experience of 'true Christians.'

All genuine consolation likewise is conferred by the Holy Spirit, who is emphatically called "the "Comforter." As a Spirit of adoption he "wit-"nesses with our spirits, that we are the children "of God," not by any immediate revelation, but by forming our hearts to all holy and filial affections towards God, and bringing reverence, confidence, love, gratitude, and zeal for his honour, into lively exercise. And in this view "the love of the "Spirit," in not only renewing our depraved nature, but coming to dwell in us as a "Comforter," and a "Spirit of adoption," and as the "seal," "earnest," and "first fruits" of our eternal inheritance, demands our highest admiration and most lively gratitude. "Thy Spirit is good; lead me "into the land of uprightness!"[2]

Whatever "strength in our souls" we need, in order to "all long-suffering with joyfulness;" to resist temptation, to overcome the world, and to meet death with cheerful hope, is ascribed to the

[1] Rom. viii. 9. [2] Psal. cxliii. 10.

at length provoked to add; "Because I called and "ye refused; therefore ye shall eat of the fruit of "your own ways, and be filled with your own "devices."

Our business, however, my brethren, is to pray for you: and we call on you all to pray for yourselves, for each other, for the unconverted part of the congregation, for your children, servants, relations and neighbours, that "the Spirit of life in "Christ Jesus may make you free from the law of "sin and death."

But suppose a person convinced that he must be renewed by the power of the Holy Spirit, though not conscious that any change has been begun: for a man's understanding may be convinced by argument that "without holiness no man shall "see the Lord," or enjoy a holy heaven; though he be still entirely destitute of holiness. He may see the doctrine exemplified in some neighbour, friend, or relative; and admire, though he dislikes, the change. And he may also have uneasy apprehensions, that without a similar change he cannot be happy. Let then, I say, such an one not give way to temptation, not indulge prejudice, not smother his convictions, not "quench the "Spirit" who is "striving with him" by these means: but let him without delay lift up his heart to God, and plead the promise of the text: let him go home, retire to his closet, fall low on his knees, and earnestly and importunately renew the same request; beseeching God to give him his Holy Spirit, that he may be made wise, holy, and happy, by his new creating grace. Let him persevere in this course, and he will find his mind open, his

" asked of him, and he would have given thee " living water." Had she *asked* he would have *given;* and, when she was further instructed, no doubt she " asked and received."—His words in another place further explain his meaning; as well as prove, when compared with the text, that " He " and the Father are one." " If any man thirst, " let him come unto me and drink. He that be- " lieveth on me as the scripture hath said, out " of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. " But this he spake of the Spirit, which they that " believe on him should receive." And again he saith, " Let him that is athirst come, and whoso- " ever will, let him take of the water of life freely." " How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity, " and scorners delight in their scorning, and fools " hate knowledge? Turn ye at my reproof; I will " pour out my Spirit unto you."

This then is the promise, and these are the persons who are instructed and invited to come and ask that they may have it fulfilled unto them. And what could the largest promises, which the greatest of men could make you, (even if to be depended on,) avail you, compared with this " ex- " ceeding great and precious promise" of " God " our Saviour?"

Conceive of a man most guilty, most depraved, most enslaved to bad habits, sunk in the grossest ignorance, or entangled in the most dangerous delusions, and under the greatest terrors and sufferings: yet suppose him to hear, and lay hold of, and plead, this promise, as one in earnest, and ready to follow the dictates of his conscience, as far as convinced; and, according to the evident

and "to walk in newness of life." "Let the "wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous "man his thoughts, and let him return unto the "Lord, and he will have mercy on him." But you find a strong, and what some of you perhaps think an insuperable, reluctancy to all these particulars. Now, you evidently want both will and power to do that, which yet your own consciences often suggest to you ought to be done. How exactly suited then is the promise of the text to your case! It is by the Holy Spirit that "God works "in us to will and to do of his good pleasure," and we call upon you, depending on his powerful aid, to "work out your own salvation with fear and "trembling." You can do nothing effectual of yourselves, but you may "do all things through "Christ thus strengthening you."

You often find much difficulty and perplexity respecting several doctrines of Christianity, and the controversies which are carried on about them; and you are ready, if seriously inquiring after truth, to wish for an infallible guide. Behold then the guide you wish for! even the Spirit of truth, whose office it is "to guide you into all truth!" And will our heavenly Father indeed give this Holy Spirit of truth and wisdom to any, to every one, "that asks him?" And is not this the very thing you want, that you may understand the truth as it is revealed in scripture, and be preserved from every delusion?

Even they, who by the grace of God have surmounted these first hindrances, and are seriously endeavouring to walk with God through Christ Jesus, in all his holy ways, find great weakness

and imperfection in their endeavours: sin yet dwells within them; darkness and uncertainty oppress them; they are liable to many discouragements, and harassed by many temptations; in short, they feel, painfully feel, their need of more complete sanctification, of clearer views, and a more established judgment; of greater strength against temptation, and of consolation under trials; indeed of every thing for which the Holy Spirit is here promised.

Now, if this be the case with you, I need not endeavour to *prove*, but only to *remind* you, that the promise is exactly what you want; and, in proportion, as you experience its accomplishment, your light, and strength, and holiness, and joy will be augmented; you will be endued with wisdom, walk at liberty, obtain victories, abound in hope, and anticipate the felicity of heaven.

IV. And now, in attempting a short application of this important subject, I would observe that, while a man continues hardened in pride, or disposed to scoff at these subjects, or to revile those who speak upon them; it cannot be expected he will pray for the Holy Spirit. Yet we must not limit the exhortations and invitations of the gospel. We therefore call even on such characters as these, in the words of Wisdom, or of Christ, "How "long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity, and "scorners delight in your scorning, and fools hate "knowledge? Turn you at my reproof. I will "pour out my Spirit unto you, I will make known "my words unto you." But take heed that "you "refuse not him that speaketh," lest he should be

at length provoked to add; "Because I called and "ye refused; therefore ye shall eat of the fruit of "your own ways, and be filled with your own "devices."

Our business, however, my brethren, is to pray for you: and we call on you all to pray for yourselves, for each other, for the unconverted part of the congregation, for your children, servants, relations and neighbours, that "the Spirit of life in "Christ Jesus may make you free from the law of "sin and death."

But suppose a person convinced that he must be renewed by the power of the Holy Spirit, though not conscious that any change has been begun: for a man's understanding may be convinced by argument that "without holiness no man shall "see the Lord," or enjoy a holy heaven; though he be still entirely destitute of holiness. He may see the doctrine exemplified in some neighbour, friend, or relative; and admire, though he dislikes, the change. And he may also have uneasy apprehensions, that without a similar change he cannot be happy. Let then, I say, such an one not give way to temptation, not indulge prejudice, not smother his convictions, not "quench the "Spirit" who is "striving with him" by these means: but let him without delay lift up his heart to God, and plead the promise of the text: let him go home, retire to his closet, fall low on his knees, and earnestly and importunately renew the same request; beseeching God to give him his Holy Spirit, that he may be made wise, holy, and happy, by his new creating grace. Let him persevere in this course, and he will find his mind open, his

heart soften, and his dislike to spiritual employments give place to pleasure and satisfaction in them: for, his nature being changed, he will then enjoy that element in which he could not live before.

We cannot go too low, in thus bringing the subject home to the hearts and consciences of sinners. From the first rising desire of knowing the way of salvation, and obtaining the favour of God, through all subsequent difficulties, perplexities and trials; this promise should be depended on, and pleaded in earnest prayer: and we may without hesitation assure you, that thus you will find light and comfort, and relief, in every possible case. "If any man will do the will of God, "he shall know of the doctrine whether it be "of God, or whether men speak of themselves." If, therefore, you desire to know and do the will of God, but are perplexed by the discordant opinions of those with "whom you converse:" practise what you now consider as your duty, and pray for the Holy Spirit to guide you "in the midst of the "paths of judgment;" and you shall not pray in vain.

Perhaps some of you are convinced that certain parts of your conduct should be altered; this or the other interest or indulgence given up, or self-denial exercised: but your passions are strong, and habits are not easily conquered; you form resolutions and break them; and at length you are ready to think "repentance, and works meet for "repentance," in your peculiar circumstances, at present impracticable. This, I apprehend, is no uncommon case; and many neglect religion on

this ground, waiting perhaps for a more favourable opportunity, or thinking the difficulties in the way will excuse their conscious and persevering disobedience. But, my fellow sinners, instead of thus "giving place to the devil," you should, without delay, avail yourselves of that effectual assistance, which is proposed in the words before us: and, while you pray earnestly for the Holy Spirit to be given you, and then attempt to follow the dictates of your consciences; though you must still feel how strong your sinful passions and temptations are, how weak your resolutions, how deceitful your hearts, and how painful and difficult it is, at first especially, to deny yourselves, "to cut off the right "hand," "to crucify the flesh," "to cease to do "evil and to learn to do well;" you will also find that it is practicable by divine grace. "With man "it is impossible; but with God all things are "possible."

If then in general you are convinced that repentance, faith in the Son of God, a new heart and newness of life, are essential to salvation, you must rely upon the Holy Spirit to enable you to attain them. If you are called to resist any particular temptation, you must act in the same dependence. If you would attend on the ordinances of God with profit and comfort, and rise superior to the coldness and formality of which we all have too much reason to complain, you must beg of your heavenly Father, for the sake of his beloved Son, to bestow upon you the Holy Spirit of love, and zeal, and gratitude: and, if you find difficulty in thus praying, your only effectual way will be to

beg of him to teach and enable you to pray as you ought, by the Spirit of grace and supplication "helping your infirmities."

Are you disconsolate, either through inward distress or outward trials? Remember the words of the apostle: "Be not drunk with wine, where-"in is excess; but be ye filled with the Spirit." Seek not exhilaration and relief from care and sorrow, by such means as must increase the cause, while they afford a momentary suspension to the effects; but earnestly beseech the God of all grace, to give unto you "the Holy Spirit, the Comforter," that you may have "peace and joy in believing, "and abound in hope" by his powerful consolations. In the same manner seek fortitude in dangers, assistance in duties, and the assurance and earnest of heaven during life, and at the approach of death.

Whatever be your station in the community, or in the church, as magistrates, senators, ministers of state, or ministers of religion: you ought to seek wisdom and grace to fill up the duties incumbent upon you, to the glory of God and the benefit of mankind, from the same author and giver of all good gifts. Whatever be the talents entrusted to you, you cannot expect to hear with comfort the solemn call, "Give an account of thy stewardship, "for thou mayest no longer be steward:" unless you improve them in dependence on the Holy Spirit, and continually pray for his teaching and assistance.

The same is the case with you, my brethren, who occupy the more lowly stations in life. You cannot be "patient in tribulation, joyful in hope;"

"contented with such things as you have," thankful for the past, simply dependent for the future, superior to murmurings, envyings, and covetings; unless the holy Spirit form your mind and heart to a heavenly taste and judgment, and communicate to you his holy consolations. You cannot properly attend to your relative duties, as parents or children, wives or husbands, masters or servants; or go on cheerfully in the laborious occupations to which you are called; or bear injuries and contempt with meekness and gentleness, except under his influence.

And can we, my brethren, wonder, that there is so little Christianity among men called Christians; that the church is so lamentably divided and corrupted? that so small a measure of love, peace, purity, and joy, appear even where we cannot but hope there is some vital piety, when we consider how generally this promise is, either entirely or in a great degree, overlooked; and how often the doctrine of the Spirit is even treated with profane ridicule? If all divine life, wisdom, holiness, and joy, come from this source; and men neglect, and quench, and grieve, and resist the Holy Spirit, in whose name they were baptized; can we be surprised that they continue "dead in sin," and "blinded by the god of this world," and that they rise no higher than mere formality?

Many of you might truly say, 'We have heard 'many sermons, and hold certain doctrines as 'evangelical; yet we are conscious that we do not 'live as we shall wish we had done when we come 'to die.' But, in hearing sermons and attending to the external parts of religion, have you been

used to pray to our heavenly Father to bestow on you the Holy Spirit of truth, and wisdom, and power? If not, you know the reason why you have received no real benefit. The seed of the word of God has been sown "by the way-side, "and the devil has taken it out of your hearts, lest "you should believe and be saved;" or it has fallen "on stony ground," where it could find no root, and so has soon withered; or among "thorns, "which have sprung up and choked it." Oh! that you would now begin earnestly to plead the promise given by the prophet: "A new heart will "I give you, and a new spirit will I put within "you; and I will take away the stony heart out "of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh; "and I will put my Spirit within you, and cause "you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep "my judgments and do them."[1] Then you would find that the seed "falling on good ground," "that "the word being received in an honest and good "heart," you would "keep it, and bring forth fruit "with patience." "Ask and it shall be given you; "seek and ye shall find; knock and it shall be "opened unto you: for every one that asketh re-"ceiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to "him that knocketh it shall be opened."

To you who really desire to find and walk in the ways of peace and holiness; it is enough to say, you have an infallible teacher, an almighty helper, and an all-sufficient comforter. More than this cannot be expressed in human language. "Happy art "thou, O Israel; who is like unto thee, O people,

[1] Ezek. xxxvi. 26, 27.

" saved by the Lord? the shield of thy help, and " the sword of thine excellency." " The eternal " God is thy Refuge, and underneath are the " everlasting arms." And the blessings which he hath bestowed " shall be in thee a well of water " springing up into everlasting life." Begin, therefore, and go through every undertaking in this confidence and dependence, with prayer and thanksgiving; and you will soon be made " more " than conquerors, through him that loved you."

In addressing you thus fully concerning the promise of the Holy Spirit, I wish it always to be understood, if not particularly mentioned, that this promise is given and fulfilled, only through the merits and mediation of Christ. But without the Spirit of Christ we can have no saving benefit from his mediation.

And now imagine to yourselves a large company, a whole nation, a continent, all the human race, universally receiving the gospel under the teaching and influences of the Holy Spirit; with deep repentance, lively faith, genuine humility, fervent love, and a heavenly mind: would not a large proportion of the miseries which now desolate the earth be terminated? Would not the remaining troubles be alleviated? Would not peace and harmony, and mutual good offices of every kind, with temperance, purity, and enlarged benevolence, effectually meliorate the state of human society? Now from whence can that be, except from God, " who is Love," which, if duly attended to, would fill the earth with holiness and happiness? Can we shew our philanthropy more effectually, than by promoting this genuine Chris-

tianity? And, if we have little else in our power, can we do better than pray continually "that the "Spirit may be poured upon us from on high;" and that "the gospel may be preached with the "Holy Ghost sent down from heaven," in every region which is enlightened by the beams of the sun?

And now, brethren, "May the grace of our "Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and "the communion of the Holy Spirit, be with us "all evermore! Amen."

END OF THE FOURTH VOLUME.

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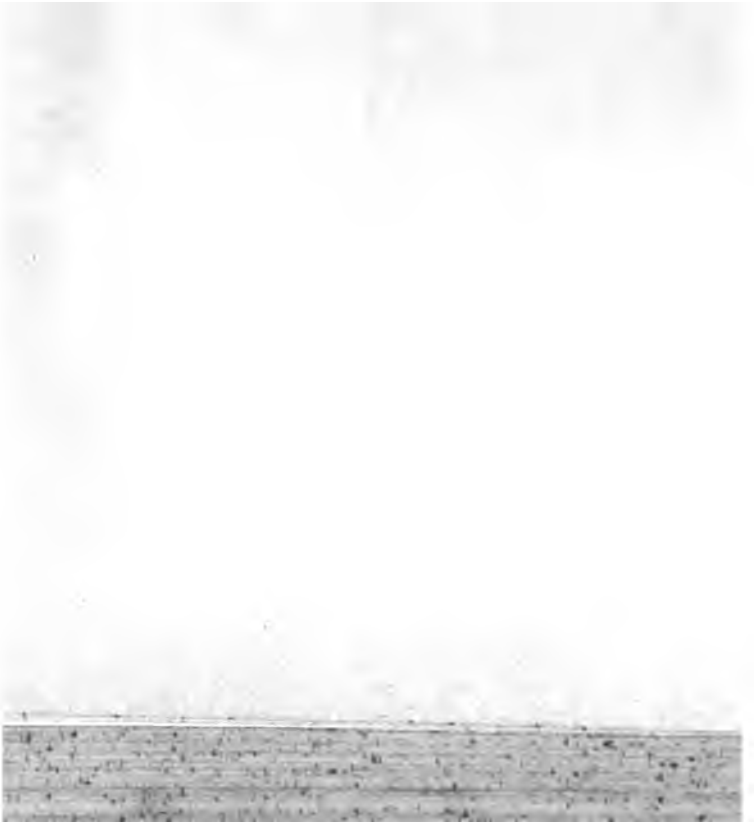

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